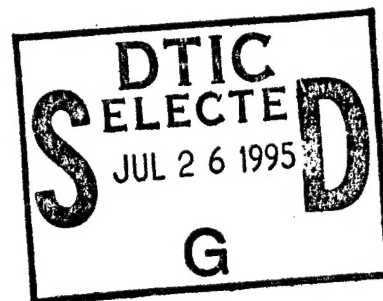


# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA



## THESIS

### THE DILEMMA OF REFUGEES: LESSONS FROM THE THAI EXPERIENCE

by

Ann Y. Rhie

December, 1994

Thesis Advisor:

Peter R. Lavoy

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**THE DILEMMA OF REFUGEES:  
LESSONS FROM THE THAI EXPERIENCE**

by

Ann Y. Rhie  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.A., University of Virginia, 1987

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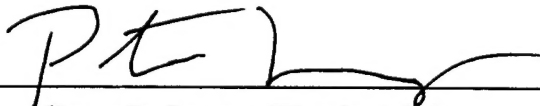
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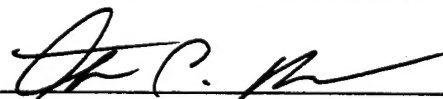
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## ABSTRACT

The specter of refugees is inextricably linked to a state's national security interests. Mass movements of refugees across international borders cannot possibly be absorbed without incurring political, social, and economic costs to the receiving state. To contribute to regional stability and international peace, the United States must be vigilant to the dangers and tensions inherent in the international problem of refugees. Nowhere have the complications of hosting refugees been demonstrated more clearly than in the case of Thailand in the past two decades. As the United States faces ethical, political, and social dilemmas posed by the threat of refugees to its national security, an examination of Thai refugee policy may be helpful in formulating an American policy on this important issue.

This thesis will call attention to the extent of the world's refugee problem; how some states have exploited refugees as instruments of their foreign policy; and what action receiving states can take to minimize the destabilizing effects of refugee populations on their borders. Specifically, I will examine Thailand's refugee crises with Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Thailand's experience with refugees is a microcosm of a universal problem. Finally, it will draw broad lessons from the Thai experience for the consideration of U.S. policy-makers responsible for refugee issues.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The specter of uncontrolled refugee poses a national security risk to states that receive them. Terrorists and economic migrants disguised as asylum-seekers will seek entry into wealthier nations. Mass migrations can cause domestic upheaval by draining scarce national resources and eroding the social fabric of the state.

This study provides suggestions for minimizing the impact of uncontrolled refugee flows upon the United States by drawing lessons from Thailand's experience with unwanted refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. As the United States moves towards restricting immigration, it is important to distinguish between immigrants and refugees, the latter deserving the traditional compassion and generosity America has to offer people in need. It is possible to remain open to refugee admissions, but it can only be accomplished by weeding out bogus asylum claims and recognizing the undue political pressures of lobby groups to admit certain groups of refugees.

Thailand was selected as the case study because it faced major refugee inflows since 1975. More than one million Laotians, Cambodians, and Vietnamese seeking to flee the persecution of Communist regimes crossed the border into Thailand, the first country of asylum. For almost two decades, the Indochinese refugees in Thailand presented enormous potential for upsetting its path to development and economic growth. By combining pragmatic policies, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) was able to employ the humanitarian assistance of the international community to ensure that the refugees did not pose a threat to its national security. Most importantly, the RTG effectively balanced humanitarian concerns while minimizing pull factors (refugee attracting policies) such as granting asylum and third-country resettlement.

From examining the Thai experience, there were three discernible groups of refugees that followed the political downfall of a government. First, refugees that were sympathetic or employed by the losing side were expected. This group was usually highly educated and received without much rancor by the receiving state. Second, the next wave of refugees were the political targets of the new government. This group encompassed people who were not able to leave in the first wave, relatives of the first-wavers, and persecuted for having ties to the former government. Third, this last wave of refugees is usually uneducated and fleeing from the economic deprivation caused by misguided policies of the new government. They generally have no ties to the fallen government and are



primarily seeking economic relief.

As conflicts based on ethnicity, ethnonationalism, and religion continue to proliferate isolated wars, refugees will continue to be generated. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees seeks "durable solutions" to the overwhelming numbers of dislocated peoples. As the receiving state, Thailand has worked with the generating states for bilateral cooperation. Voluntary repatriation is a favored solution. This occurs when the sources of conflict abate and stability is restored. The Indochinese governments are working towards this goal. This was the only means for Thailand to be rid of their refugees.

The United States faced similar situations with Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico. Increasingly, the margin between economic migrants and political asylees is closing. Unlike the Royal Thai Government, however, the United States does not recognize the end of the Cold War in its refugee admissions policies. Strong lobby groups of former refugees and/or people with shared ethnicity are determining the refugee policies of our government. Cubans and refugees from other former Soviet bloc countries receive priority admissions. This causes an anomaly in the acceptance rate of asylum-seekers from these countries. They are often admitted at the expense of others who lack the political lobbying voice in the United States but deserve preferential treatment in refugee admissions.

It is the conclusion of this study that immigration and refugee policies are intertwined. There is no moral compunction for restricting immigration to educated and self-supporting people. However, in refugee admissions policies, we as a nation should be sympathetic to persecuted people suffering under oppressive regimes. These people should be admitted regardless of our political relations with the state from which they come.

Moreover, the United States should follow the lead of Thailand by recognizing a need for bilateral cooperation between former enemies. Past tensions with the Cuban government may have no place in the coming century. Just as Thailand has softened its policies towards its former enemies in Cambodia and Vietnam, the United States might follow the Thai example in dealing with Cuba. Any improvement in relations with Cuba may decrease refugee flows into the United States and exert a positive influence on relations with Cuba's neighbors. These are essential contributions to hemispheric economic development and political stability.

## I. REFUGEES AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

### A. INTRODUCTION

Refugees pose a national security risk to states that receive them. Terrorists and economic migrants disguised as asylum-seekers will continue to knock on the doors of wealthier developed nations.<sup>1</sup> As populations grow and conflicts based on ethnicity, economics, and religion occur in less developed and newly independent states, the trend for the future seems to be a continuation of refugee migration, internally and across international borders. Mass uncontrolled migrations will exacerbate existing tensions among class, ethnic, and religious divisions in the receiving states.

This study provides suggestions for minimizing the impact of uncontrolled refugee flows upon the United States by drawing lessons from the Thai experience with refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. As weak economic growth and the ever-growing budget deficit continue to burden the taxpayer, the refugee and illegal immigrant provides an easy scapegoat for the frustrations of Americans. For many countries including the United States, migration and refugees are tied together. Both illegal immigrants and political asylees are widely perceived to take jobs from Americans, erode the social fabric of the state, and receive entitlements that drain scarce national resources. In 1980, the Mariel Boatlift epitomized the ills of uncontrolled refugee and immigrant flows. In the 1990s, continued migration from Third World neighbors including Mexico, Cuba, and

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<sup>1</sup>Telephone interview with U.S. State Department official. One of the inherent dangers of granting asylum to political refugees is the terrorist in disguise. The World Trade Center bombing is a prime example of how "refugee-warriors" carry out their agenda within the host country. In Thailand, many Lao were kept in controlled camps because of Communist elements within the refugee population that organized with Thai Communist insurgents to carry out subversive activities against the Royal Thai Government. For further information on false asylum claims from economic migrants and would-be terrorists, see Dick Kirschten, "Catch-up Ball," *National Journal* 7 August 1993, pp. 1976-1979.

Haiti are creating a backlash against immigrant populations in California, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey where many refugee populations live.

As "compassion fatigue" hits the United States, more restrictive immigration policies will be legislated. Although our country was developed by immigrants seeking better opportunities in the New World, the cycle of xenophobia hits when Americans must compete with refugees and illegal immigrants for existing resources. Anti-immigrant measures such as Proposition 187 in California restrict health and educational services to illegal immigrants. When economies lag, immigrants and refugees are favorite targets of a frustrated populace. Unlike the well-educated middle-class refugees that fled Castro in the 1960s or Communist regimes during the Cold War, the latest waves are of a lower educational and economic class.

By better understanding that refugee politics is driven by domestic lobbyist concerns as well as Cold War foreign policy, the United States government can pursue new agreements with states to address the roots of refugee generation. As long as the traditionally generous American public perceives we are providing humanitarian assistance to the true asylum-seeker and not merely giving away valuable resources to the economic migrant, domestic rancor and political backlash will not occur.

The recent uncontrolled exoduses from Cuba and Haiti signaled the threats that refugees pose for American national security. The potential arrival of Haitian boatloads on our shores was certainly a factor in the decision to invade Haiti. The threat of a second "Mariel Boatlift" scenario forced us to re-evaluate our unilateral Cuban foreign policy. Political asylum should not be automatic for Cubans despite the powerful political clout of Cuban lobbyists. Selection for immigration and asylum must be calculated on the basis of need and not the politics of special interest groups.

Thailand has been selected as a case study for how a state may receive large inflows of refugees without incurring major domestic unrest specifically tied to their reception. It has been faced with major refugee inflows since 1975. Laotians, Cambodians, and

Vietnamese have fled to its borders seeking refuge from repressive Communist regimes and subsequent severe economic conditions. Over the past two decades, Thailand has not been without domestic turmoil as internal power struggles have ended in numerous bloodless coups. However, unlike its neighbors, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) has not been faced with ideological battles culminating in civil war. The numerous coups in the RTG did not create conditions for refugee generation. They created authoritarian regimes that suppressed democratization in favor of internal development towards achieving economic growth.

As the refugees came over the borders, the Thais were determined to control the influxes and discourage further migration by instituting strict anti-refugee policies that would hopefully to deter major inflows. As a non-signatory to international refugee agreements, Thailand was not legally bound to provide protection for the refugees and labeled them as illegal immigrants rather than people fleeing persecution.

Thailand's policies towards refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam illustrate how their presence does not necessarily preclude domestic upheaval. By understanding the political roots and consequences of refugee generation and reception, lessons from the Thai experience may be helpful in controlling inflows to the United States. The Thais were heavily criticized by the international community for their fluctuating policies. This author does not endorse the methods employed by the RTG. However, the United States can certainly incorporate modified policies that will afford the true asylum-seeker more effective protection and weed out the economic migrant that circumvents normal immigration paths by exploiting existing asylum procedures.

## **B. SOURCES AND METHODS**

This study is based on research compiled from numerous journal articles, topical papers, books, interviews, and information services including a Southeast Asia discussion list over the Internet. Sources include academicians knowledgeable in refugee politics,

refugees, students, field workers, dissidents, government agencies such as the United States Department of State, and field workers from non-governmental agencies including the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The background of the sources varies widely. Most are affiliated with government and humanitarian agencies. Although the UNHCR will figure prominently in this study, most of the refugee data and history was culled from USCR publications. I have found they are more objective in their reporting than the UNHCR or governments sources. To counteract the effects of bias, I have tried to offer viewpoints from all sides of the issues.

The objective of this thesis is to illustrate the global problem of refugees, to show how they can affect a state's national security, and to offer some broad policy suggestions for managing uncontrolled exodus onto American soil by incorporating the methods employed by the Thais. These methods would include detention centers for mass exodus arrivals by boat, more stringent screening procedures, better control of our borders, and ameliorating the root causes of refugee generation.

The first part of my thesis will define refugee terminology and give an overview of the world's past and current refugee problems. It will explain why refugee organizations must abide by legal definitions and mandates in the process of providing humanitarian assistance. By providing a global assesment of the present refugee situation as threats to international security, it will show the magnitude of this ongoing international crisis. It is also necessary to provide a historical background of the origins and evolution of refugee relief to gain an understanding of what roles the core humanitarian agency, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the international community, play in providing refugee relief.

The body of this thesis will introduce a brief history of Thailand's political culture as a basis for understanding their fickle policies towards refugees on their border. Following this assessment behind Thai policies, individual country case study analyses will

show which of the major push and pull factors induced the refugee exoduses. General push factors are economics, political, or social. Specific pull factors are resettlement, improved economic conditions, and asylum. Although all factors are present in each case, certain factors alone or in combination dominate the root causes of refugee generation in these Indochinese situations. In the Laotian case, economics became the dominant factor after the initial wave of political refugees. With the Cambodians, political pressures were the root cause of refugee generation. For Vietnam, a combination of social and economic reasons dominated over the political considerations. The pull factors contributed to further refugee generation in all cases.

As a conclusion, the Thai refugee experience from 1975 to 1992 will be assessed for correlating variables between the treatment of refugees and their ethnicity, prospects for resettlement, and political expediency. By extracting and modifying some of Thai policies, the United States can derive lessons in controlling bogus political asylum cases and uncontrolled mass inflows from our neighboring states in the Western hemisphere.

### C. DEFINITIONS

A refugee as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is "one who, owing to religious persecution or political troubles, seeks refuge in a foreign country."<sup>2</sup> The term was originally applied to the French Huguenots who came to England after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In 1993, more than 16,255,000 people worldwide fled their countries of origin and were considered refugees.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, the legal

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<sup>2</sup>Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 493.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), World Refugee Survey--1994 (Washington, D.C.: [USCR]/American Council for Nationalities Service[ANCS], 1994), 41. These figures are for December 31, 1993 and do not include the estimated twenty-four million internally displaced persons such as those in the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. Statistics were compiled from various sources including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United

definition of a refugee as used by the United Nations (UN) and signatories of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

[Any person who]...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence..., is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (as amended by Article 1(2) of the 1967 Protocol)<sup>4</sup>

Refugees are the byproducts of both internal and international conflicts. The concept of protection by the international community did not come into force until the twentieth century. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the dominant international organization for managing refugee protection.

Neither the Convention nor Protocol guarantees asylum to refugees. It regulates the conduct of the states who have agreed to abide by its principles of providing international protection. Above all else, it assists states in determining whether an asylum-seeker fits the description of a refugee as prescribed by the UNHCR statute.

Refugees differ from economic migrants and illegal immigrants. Economic migrants leave their country of origin for better economic opportunities. Although

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States Department of State, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). USCR was founded in 1958 as a private, non-profit organization of the Immigration and Refugee Services of America. It does not receive any government funds. Its mandate is to collect and provide information on refugees to U.S. policymakers and the public.

<sup>4</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 163. The Convention and Protocol are international instruments in matters relating to the treatment of refugees. The 1967 Protocol extends the scope of the 1951 Convention by removing the dateline and geographic considerations of 1 January 1951 contained in the original definition of refugee. The 1951 Convention has a geographic boundary of events occurring in Europe.

political conflict and worsening economic conditions are interrelated, some economic migrants circumvent regular immigration policies by applying for political asylum.<sup>5</sup>

Illegal immigrants are those that enter another country without immigration formalities. Most refugees fleeing conflict do not have the time to apply for paperwork. A state that wishes to avoid liability for protecting a refugee will sometimes classify the asylum-seeker as an economic migrant or illegal immigrant.<sup>6</sup> They do not have a legal mandate to be afforded the protection of the international community.

If determined to be a true refugee, the asylum-seeker is guaranteed protection from forced repatriation or, *non-refoulement*.<sup>7</sup> The fear of expulsion or involuntary return is the refugee's greatest concern. This concept of *non-refoulement* is defined by Article 33 of the Protocol as:

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<sup>5</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 25.

<sup>6</sup>Guy Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 83.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, See Chapters V-VIII for details on individual country laws concerning asylum and protection of refugees. Although refugee and asylum-seeker have the same meaning there is a subtle distinction between them that warrants further clarification. A refugee is always an asylum-seeker, whether temporary or permanent. However, unless the person is considered to have been persecuted under the UN mandated definition, the host country's government will not consider them eligible for asylum. Thailand does not allow their refugees to apply for asylum because the government considers them illegal immigrants. In this case, the withholding of refugee status by the government allows them to deny protection under refugee mandate. Under international law, the person must cross the border of his country of origin into a second country to be granted asylum as a refugee. If granted refugee status, he then applies for asylum to a country of permanent resettlement. If this country is different from the first country of asylum, it is considered third country resettlement. For example, the United States is usually a third country of resettlement because of its inaccessibility to most refugees. Once in the United States, he becomes an asylee. Refugees are not necessarily given asylum by a host country. Refugee has become a generally accepted term, e.g. the recent influx of Cubans in August-September 1994, but unless they can prove they have been persecuted on the grounds defined in the UN definition, they are not true refugees.



No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.<sup>11</sup>

If a country such as Thailand is not a signatory to either the Convention or Protocol, it does not have a legal obligation to honor the concept of *non-refoulement*. There will be international pressure to honor this code for moral reasons, but countries such as Thailand are not in violation of any international code if they do not abide by the concept of *non-refoulement*. In 1979, after vigorous protests by the UNHCR and other nations, the Thais reversed their policy of forced repatriation of Cambodian asylum-seekers, but did not grant them asylee status.<sup>12</sup>

The act of granting asylum as a refugee under the UNHCR mandate will greatly impact the numbers of refugees considered in statistics generated by the international community.

#### **D. SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM**

The mass movement of refugees across international borders threatens to destabilize governments, states, and regions all over the world. Although some refugee flows have wrought favorable changes, such as the East German influx that eventually helped bring down the Berlin Wall, most instances of refugee movements have created instabilities for receiving states.

The flow of Haitian and Cuban refugees has forced the United States to reexamine its foreign policy towards neighboring states. President Bill Clinton cited the arrival of

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<sup>11</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 163.

<sup>12</sup>Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law*, 77.

Haitian refugees as a major reason for the military invasion of Haiti.<sup>13</sup> Lawton Chiles, Governor of Florida, declared an impending state of emergency as Cuban asylum-seekers washed ashore on Florida's coastline.<sup>14</sup> Going against longstanding policy, Cubans are no longer granted automatic political asylum but housed instead in a refugee camp at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

In Europe, the fear of refugee spillover from the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is one reason for the lack of military intervention by the European Community.<sup>15</sup> Winston Lord, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, lists the "spawning of refugees" as one of the "global risks" in the Pacific.<sup>16</sup>

Gil Loescher, a refugee expert at the University of Notre Dame, writes:

These refugee exoduses are commanding the attention of high level policy-makers not only for humanitarian reasons and because of the increasing numbers involved, but also because of the serious consequences that mass displacements have for national stability, international security and the emerging new world order.<sup>17</sup>

With the end of superpower rivalry, the absence of a bipolar balance of power has unleashed conflicts stemming from ethnic, cultural, and religious clashes. The ideological proxy wars have ceded to innumerable flashpoints such as the civil war in Bosnia-

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<sup>13</sup>President Bill Clinton, CBS News Special Broadcast, 15 September 1994.

<sup>14</sup>Lawton Chiles, New York Times, 18 August 1994, A12.

<sup>15</sup>Patrick Moore, "Diplomatic Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia," RFE/RL Research Reports, 24 January 1992, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Winston Lord, "A New Pacific Community, Ten Goals for American Policy," opening statement at confirmation hearings for Assistant Secretary of State before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 31 March 1993.

<sup>17</sup>Gil Loescher, Refugee Movements and International Security, Adelphi Papers 268, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], Summer 1992), 3.

Herzegovinia, the ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet republics, and tribal genocide among African tribes in Rwanda, Somalia, and the Sudan. These localized wars have already produced large numbers of internally displaced persons and mass exoduses of refugees. There is a great likelihood of increasing numbers of low intensity conflicts into the twenty-first century. More refugees are likely to follow.

In "The Coming Anarchy," Robert D. Kaplan writes, "...as refugee flows increase...national borders will mean less...the real borders are the most tangible and intractable ones: those of culture and tribe."<sup>18</sup> If this is correct, international refugee crises along ethnic and religious lines will continue to proliferate.

As conflicts occur, refugees will be generated. As global population expands, there will be increased competition for scarce resources. Refugee movements and migration patterns are causally linked. Overburdened states are already reluctant to house, feed, and care for refugees and illegal immigrants. Refugees will more likely be labeled as economic migrants rather than as political refugees. By categorizing the asylum-seeker as an economic migrant, the first country of asylum does not have a legal obligation to grant him refuge. In order to avoid domestic social upheavals caused by the admittance of asylum-seekers, states will tend to restrict immigration. There is a strong correlation between the amity of interstate relations and tensions created by refugee problems.<sup>19</sup>

The numbers of refugees and asylum seekers decreased from 17.5 million in 1992 to just over 16.2 in 1993. This significant drop is an inaccurate depiction of the true refugee situation. Senior Policy Analyst Bill Frelick of the USCR views this as a growing unwillingness by receiving states to grant protection: internally displaced and rejected

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<sup>18</sup>Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly*, (February 1994): 60. Kaplan expands upon Samuel Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993).

<sup>19</sup>Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security*, 5.

applicants for asylum are not considered in the final figures for refugee statistics.<sup>20</sup> If an asylum-seeker does not fit the country of asylum's parameters, the individual will not be counted as a refugee, but as an asylum candidate. The world's refugee numbers are still alarmingly high. These statistics were compiled from USCR's first-hand assessments, designations from the UNHCR, U.S. State Department, NGOs, the media, governments, private voluntary organizations, and human rights groups.<sup>21</sup> (See Appendix A for a complete list.) Figures for 1993 from the U.S. State Department's annual Refugee Survey were yet unavailable at the time of this study, Fall 1994.

The following table gives a comparison between year end statistics compiled on 31 December 1992 and 31 December 1993. (See Appendix B for a complete breakdown of generating and receiving states.) The numbers do not include selected populations in refugee-like situations. The statistics are for both refugees and asylum-seekers but do not include those refugees that have settled in other countries.

Because the USCR is a compilation of different sources and a non-governmental organization, this study will use its numbers. The U.S. State Department must publish numbers dependent on official sources -that is, other governments. The UNHCR also has a political bias since it is bound to follow the Protocol's definition. Recently, it has recognized this shortcoming and compiled two sets of numbers. The first set uses numbers under the UN mandate, the second includes people it believes need protection but are not considered candidates for asylum by the country of first asylum. For these reasons, USCR statistics have been used.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Bill Frelick, "The Year in Review," in World Refugee Survey--1994 (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS), 2.

<sup>21</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1994, 39.

<sup>22</sup>Telephone interview with Virginia Hamilton, Editor and Assistant Director of USCR, 11 October 1994. This confirms the author's opinions derived from comparing statistics between the organizations.

<b>REGION</b>	<b>REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS</b>	
	<b>1992</b>	<b>1993</b>
Africa	5,698,450	5,825,000
Europe	3,282,200	2,614,100
North America	141,000	170,900
Latin America and the Caribbean	107,7000	102,000
East Asia and the Pacific	398,600	468,000
Middle East	5,586,850	4,924,000
South and Central Asia	2,341,700	2,151,000
Total	17,556,900	16,255,000
Compiled from USCR World Refugee Survey--1993 and USCR World Refugee Survey--1992. *North America consists of the United States and Canada.		

Table 1. 1992 and 1993 World Refugee and Asylum-Seekers

#### **E. ORIGINS AND EXPANSION OF THE UNHCR**

To better understand the dimensions of refugee politics, a brief history of the evolution of the UNHCR is helpful in understanding why humanitarian relief is so politicized. Because the twentieth century produced the largest numbers of refugees in history, it was necessary to consolidate and legalize a concerted effort by the world community to deal with refugee issues. Refugee relief began in Europe, but its mandate spread globally. Presently, 122 states formally recognize the UN's mandate on refugee protection. Sixty-ones states remain non-signatories to the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol. Thailand remains in the latter category.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1994, 45.

After the First World War, the transformation of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires into more or less ethnically and religiously homogeneous nation-states produced the first major waves of refugees in the twentieth century. Out of the diaspora came a general unmixing of peoples and further consolidation of new borders. Large groups of displaced persons that remained within the newly formed states were trapped. These were the minorities and stateless, of which many were the Jews, Armenians, and White Russians. They found themselves without the rights afforded a citizen of a state.<sup>24</sup>

The dramatic political and social upheaval caused by the collapse of these empires produced interstate tensions. The minorities were often targeted as the source of deteriorating economic conditions and ethnonationalistic strife. A favored method of reducing such tensions was ethnic cleansing. It is estimated that more than one million Armenians were massacred by the Turks between 1914 and 1919. The remaining one million survivors fled to anyplace they could find refuge. Russia produced between one and two million refugees as a result of the Bolshevik revolution, the Russo-Polish war, and the Great Famine of 1921. Vogue terms like ethnic cleansing and ethnonationalism that are frequently used by present day political scientists, journalists, and politicians have antecedents prior to the post-Cold War period.<sup>25</sup>

The chaotic conditions created by stateless persons in Europe were exacerbated by the new governments that encouraged "exit."<sup>26</sup> By allowing and encouraging persecution

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<sup>24</sup>Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, Escape from Violence: conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12-15.

<sup>25</sup>Gil Loescher, Beyond Charity: international cooperation and the global refugee crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 35.

<sup>26</sup>Zolberg et al., 27. Adapted from Albert Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). Hirschman describes "exit" as the

of undesirable minority groups, displaced people all over Europe looked towards emigration as the answer. However, nations like the United States that had liberal immigration policies began to restrict quotas for two reasons. First, elites in Western nations wanted to encourage a national identity. They feared the political ramifications of allowing too many ethnic minority groups into their countries. Second, the worldwide economic depression put a strain on existing social services.<sup>27</sup> Today's arguments in favor of restricting immigration and denying liberal asylum are the same ones used in previous decades.

To alleviate the plight of these refugees and decrease interstate tensions, the League of Nations sought a solution by finding them permanent resettlement. Fridtjof Nansen, the Norwegian Arctic explorer was appointed High Commissioner on 1 September 1921. His was to be a temporary post aimed at resettling refugees. Nansen was chosen for his previous humanitarian efforts in repatriating German and Austrian prisoners-of-war and providing famine relief to the Russians. He created the Certificate of Identity, or "Nansen Passport", which gave refugees legal status in their host countries and allowed them to travel, but more importantly, to work. He died in 1930 in the midst of convincing governments to accept European refugees for resettlement. His temporary post was renamed the Nansen Office and lives on as the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to providing jobs for the millions of stateless persons, the Nansen Office was able to ratify the first attempt by the international community to provide the first official mandate for the refugees. The 1933 Convention Relating to the International

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alternative option to "voice" within societies where its citizens impose self-exile when dissent is not tolerated or effective against the ruling government.

<sup>27</sup>Zolberg et al., Escape from Violence, 19.

<sup>28</sup>Yéfime Zarjevski, A Future Preserved (Oxford: UNHCR, 1988), 7.

Status of Refugees defined a refugee as someone "(a) outside their country of origin, and (b) without the protection of the government of the state."<sup>29</sup> It was a modest beginning with only eight signatories.<sup>30</sup>

The interwar years saw the rise in numbers of refugees fleeing from fascist government in Germany and Italy. Jews in particular were the most targeted group for pogroms. An *ad hoc* measure by the League attempted to ameliorate the plight of Jewish refugees. A special High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany, James G. McDonald, was appointed in 1933. Its purpose was simply to resettle Jews and other refugees to other countries willing to accept them. The Office had no power to address or protest the political sources of refugee generation. As Germany was still a member of the League, it was impolitic to condemn the human rights abuses of Nazi Germany. McDonald's authority was not commensurate with his responsibility. In frustration, he resigned.<sup>31</sup> Addressing the political roots of refugee generation is the number one hindrance to decreasing refugee generation today.<sup>32</sup> The UNHCR recognizes this but must concede to the sovereignty of the host country's government.

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<sup>29</sup>Goodwin-Gill, The Refugee in International Law, 2.

<sup>30</sup>Zarjevski, A Future Preserved, 7.

<sup>31</sup>Zolberg et al., Escape from Violence, 20.

<sup>32</sup>UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, 8-9.



1920	Nansen appointed League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees
1938	Evian Conference
1943	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRAA)
1947	International Refugee Organization (IRO)
1948	United Nations Relief and Works Association (UNRWA) -- creation of the Palestinian refugee camps
1950	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR)
1951	United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
1956	United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF)
1957	Hungarians flee to western bloc Algerians flee to Tunisia and Morocco
1959	Tibetans flee to India and Nepal
1960	World Refugee Year African refugee movements through the 1960s and 1970s
1967	Biafran War in Nigeria
1969	Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa
1971	Bangladesh Crisis
1972	UNHCR operations open in Thailand
1975	Fall of Vientiane, Phnom Penh, and Saigon First Wave of Southeast Asian refugees
1978	Vietnamese Invasion of Cambodia Second Wave of Southeast Asian refugees
1979	Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees Soviet-backed coup in Afghanistan
1982	Third Wave of Southeast Asian refugees
1984	Famine in the Horn of Africa Karen (Burmese) flee to Thailand
1989	Second Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees End of the Cold War
1993	Cambodian elections
1994	Continuing repatriation programs throughout Southeast Asia
Source: Lynellyn D. Long, <i>Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp</i> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 15.	

Table 2. A Chronology of Selected Refugee Events

By 1938 the European refugee crisis had worsened. Under mounting political pressure from Jewish groups, President Franklin D. Roosevelt chaired an international conference of thirty-two nations in Evian, France to resolve resettlement issues. As the United States was not a member of the League, it joined with other non-League countries to form another *ad hoc* organization, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees

(ICGR). As with the other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), it was not effective in resolving the roots of refugee generation. The ICGR was able to facilitate an orderly departure of some German Jews, but not before they were stripped of the property by the Nazis.<sup>33</sup>

With the rise in xenophobia, economic hardship, and bigotry, many nations closed their borders to the Jews and other exiles. As quotas for immigration dropped from receiving states, the Nazis chose ethnic cleansing as a means to consolidate national racial purity. Many countries, including the United States, were reluctant to believe the reports of atrocities practiced by the Nazi regime. The Jewish experience later served as a very important moral impetus for Western nations to respond to future refugee crises. This would become a rallying point for many in the Cambodian crisis.

By the end of the Second World War, over thirty million refugees had been generated. Never in history had so many people been dislocated by war. Other NGOs were created to tackle this enormous problem. During the war years, one of the first to be chartered was the United Nation's Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). Confident of victory, the Big Three established this plan on 9 November 1943. The purpose of UNRRA was to return the displaced persons liberated by the Allies back to their countries.<sup>34</sup> More than three-fourths of the refugees were repatriated. Some went with great reluctance, especially self-exiled Soviets and Eastern Europeans who did not want to return to a Stalinist regime. This forced repatriation was strongly criticized by the United States as the Soviets exerted more control of their growing sphere of influence.

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<sup>33</sup>Loescher, *Beyond Charity*, 45.

<sup>34</sup>William L. Langer, ed., *An Encyclopedia of World History*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 1156. The United Nations was formally chartered in 1945 at the San Francisco Conference of April 25-June 25. During the war years, an international federation based on the Atlantic charter was formed by the Allies and called the United Nations Organization.

The politicization of UNRAA policies lead to the formation of another *ad hoc* United Nations organization, the International Refugee Organization (IRO).<sup>35</sup>

The IRO epitomized the coming split between the superpowers. Funded mainly by the United States, the expanded role of the IRO was to help "those unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of the government of their country of nationality or former residence."<sup>36</sup>

It was a highly politicized organization that heightened growing East-West tensions. The United States was interested in assisting refugees fleeing the political persecution under "communism" whereas the Soviet Union barred exit from their bloc countries of people going to "capitalist" states.<sup>37</sup> Of the \$400 US million IRO budget, \$250 US million came from American coffers. Already burdened by the Marshall Plan, the United States did not have any faith in a short-term solution by the IRO. The United States became disenchanted as fears that she and her Western Allies would be expected to continue funding and handling the European refugee problem. It was felt that refugee problems could be resolved on a bilateral basis.<sup>38</sup>

Escalating Cold War politics, the partition of India in 1947, and other refugee-generating world events forced a reassessment of the IRO by the United Nations (UN). Refugee problems were exceeding the authority and power of the IRO. The UN General Assembly voted on 1 January 1951 to create the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Originally, it had a three year term to protect and provide

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<sup>35</sup>Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History*, 49.

<sup>36</sup>Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law*, 4.

<sup>37</sup>By barring "exit", the Soviets could deny their citizens an opportunity to serve as models for dissatisfaction in their ideological utopia. Many states, including the ones in Southeast Asia view mass exoduses as a backlash against their policies. As a source of embarrassment, denying "exit" to their citizens is one aspect of refugee politics.

<sup>38</sup>Loescher, *Beyond Charity*, 57.

lasting solutions for a permanent resolution for refugees created prior to 1 January 1951. As new refugee crises emerged, it was changed to five year terms with successive renewals. Its mandate was clearly humanitarian, not political.<sup>39</sup> Realistically, however, Cold War politics continued to dominate the course of the UNHCR and humanitarian aid efforts worldwide.

## **F. REFUGEE POLITICS DURING THE COLD WAR**

Consistent with Cold War rivalry that infused most of the world's politics, refugee relief was not exempt. The world was now drawn along East and West camps. The United States lost confidence with the UN overall. The concept of universalism gave way to the harsh realities of incompatible ideologies and goals. In April of 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated:

faith in the ability of the United Nations as presently constituted to protect, now or hereafter, the security of the United States would mean only that the faithful have lost sight of the vital security interest of the United States and could quite possibly lead to results fatal to that strategy.<sup>40</sup>

Up until 1954, all refugee issues were resolved on a bilateral basis with NGOs outside the UN. Because of active intervention on behalf of the Jews during the war years, American policy reflected a commitment to accepting political refugees. In measures such as the 1953 Refugee Relief Act and the Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957, immigration quotas were expanded. The National Security Council viewed the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 as a "device to 'encourage defection of all USSR nationals and key personnel from the satellite countries' in order to 'inflict a psychological blow on

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<sup>39</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 169.

<sup>40</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 57.

Communism.<sup>41</sup> This granted almost automatic asylum for any immigrant from a Soviet bloc country. It set the precedence for Cuban refugees being granted asylum over Haitians seeking economic relief although both can arguably be considered refugees.

Equally disgruntled was the Soviet Union and their bloc countries. It perceived the UN and its NGOs as instruments of the West to discredit their regime. "The recognition of East European emigrants as refugee stigmatized their countries of origin as willful violators of the human rights of their citizens."<sup>42</sup> It was little wonder the UNHCR was incapable of not offending either superpower despite their stance of neutrality. This recurring theme will be seen in Vietnamese and Cambodian refugee politics.

As the Cold War was fought on every ideological playing field, the Soviet Union responded to the 1953 Refugee Act by offering amnesty and encouraging a drop-off in the "brain drain" from Eastern Europe. The Soviet bloc was committed to a policy of barring emigration. The American response was to wholeheartedly support the UNHCR. The first contribution of \$500,000 US dollars was approved in 1955. Other countries followed suit and ensured its viability.<sup>43</sup>

Contributions to the UN's annual budget is assessed wholly on a country's ability to pay. Wealthier nations like the United States pay the lion's share of the collected dues. Contrary to this established collection system, the UNHCR receives its funding from individual governments, agencies, and private organizations.<sup>44</sup> Although in principle the

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<sup>41</sup>Zolberg et al., *Escape from Violence*, 27.

<sup>42</sup>Loescher, *Beyond Charity*, 59.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>44</sup>Shelly Pitterman, "Determinants of International Refugee Policy: A Comparative Study of UNHCR Material Assistance to Refugees in Africa 1963-1981," in John R. Rogge, ed., *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma*, (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), 18.

UNHCR was to be neutral and apolitical, its donors still had influence in the operations of the agency.

In the 1960s, the growing problem of refugees shifted from East-West tensions in Europe and its bloc countries to the Third World. The only major European refugee crisis resulted from the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In the Western hemisphere, the rise of Fidel Castro created a mass exodus of middle-class Cubans to the United States. The Soviets had effectively barred exit as a means to escape political persecution from their satellite countries. However, many conflicts in de-colonized Third World countries were proxy wars that had superpower backing. This was widely apparent in the Indochinese ideological conflicts.

As post-colonial Africa produced newly independent states, huge numbers of refugees were also created. The UNHCR deemphasized the role of refugees in the ideological clash between the superpowers to those fleeing civil wars and ethnic strife. Unlike the refugees created from the Second World War in Europe, the African refugees were given third country resettlement as a last resort. The new emphasis was on regional integration or better yet, repatriation. The UNHCR mandate was humanitarian assistance first.<sup>45</sup>

The growing proxy war in Indochina also created victims of post-colonial conflicts. In the 1960s, the civil South and North Vietnam displaced people internally but did not create refugees fleeing international borders. Two reasons existed for this non-exodus. First, each side had safe havens for the uprooted civilians. Moreover, the internationalization of essentially a civil war by the United States meant the mass departures of Vietnamese citizens would detract from the idea of populace support for the war.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Loescher, *Beyond Charity*, 77-80.

<sup>46</sup>Zolberg et al., *Escape from Violence*, 164.

Although the concept of providing aid to refugees originated in Europe, the eruption of global crises in Africa in the 1960s combined with international media attention clearly made the 1951 Convention outdated. Largely as a result of the African crisis, the UNHCR recognized a need for overhauling its mandate. Subsequently, the UNHCR's 1967 Protocol Regarding Refugees thus expanded the time and geographic definition of a refugee to meet the growing demands of refugees everywhere. This time, the United States along with Swaziland, Cape Verde, and Venezuela became signatories.<sup>47</sup> Most countries in Asia including Thailand did not ratify this landmark Protocol.

By the 1970s, the UNHCR was heavily involved in developmental aid and working with other NGOs. Global figures from 1970-1980 show an increase from 2.5 million to 8.2 million refugees, an increase of 328 percent. In 1980, there were over 2.3 million from Asia alone. By 1990, the numbers had risen to 7.9 million. Asylum countries granted asylum to the refugees based on political leanings. The proxy wars such as the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in the 1970s and 1980s were largely responsible for producing these large numbers of refugees in Southeast Asia. Once the United States pulled out of Vietnam, anyone who had previous ties to the United States government was persecuted. By this time, there were no safe havens within Vietnam. Ironically, the United States found itself as one of the primary resettlement countries.<sup>48</sup>

In the post Cold War period, the world is faced with the problem of repatriating many refugees generated by the proxy wars. Added to the list of stateless people are refugees from ethnic conflict and economic deprivation in this new era. Pull-factors such as the growth in telecommunications allows people of impoverished circumstances to see the economic benefits in developed nations, there will be more applications for

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<sup>47</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 167. This list does not include any states who became State Parties to the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol after 1 June 1993.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-8.

immigration under the guise of political asylum. The old East-West tensions are gone, but the perpetual North-South disparity will exacerbate international tensions.<sup>49</sup> Determining the true refugee from an economic migrant is difficult since political conflict will exacerbate economic deprivation. Balancing humanitarianism without incurring domestic unrest is a challenge for the coming century.

In the Thai experience, elements of both humanitarianism and inhumane policies were present in the twenty years of refugee inflows. Although they can be criticized for not offering more protection, the refugees crises did not disrupt their internal development.

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<sup>49</sup>Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security*, 67.



# EAST ASIA



Map 1. East Asia

## II. THAILAND: A CASE STUDY FOR REFUGEE MANAGEMENT

### A. THAI NATIONALISM

In 1975 the pro-Western governments in Phnom Penh, Saigon, and Vientiane fell to Communist forces. What had been a trickle of refugees in the early 1970s became a flood as hundreds of thousands of people spilled over from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos into Thailand. Because it had not been ravaged by war, Thailand had comparative stability and prosperity. Small numbers of refugees did not alarm the Thais. It was traditional for the Thais to offer resettlement to foreigners. Over 240,000 Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotians, Burmese, and other Southeast Asians had been granted permanent asylum between the Second World War and 1975.<sup>50</sup> However, by the late 1970s, the small numbers of refugees seeking refuge became a torrent.

Historically, Thailand has practiced "weathervane" or "bending in the wind" diplomacy. This approach is derived from the idea that Thailand is a small tree, drawn to big powers for whatever degree of protection can be provided in order to maintain its self-preservation.<sup>51</sup> By assessing and exploiting the merits of what a big power could do for their country, the Thais were able to remain uncolonized by the imperial forces of Europe unlike their neighbors in Burma and Indochina. Pragmatism remains the basis for Thai foreign policy today.

Caught between the French on the East and British on the West, the Thais were artful and skilled manipulators who played Western colonial powers against one another. Thailand (Siam) remained a sovereign state under King Mongkut (r.1851-1868) and later his son Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910). The kingdom of Siam remained a buffer state

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<sup>50</sup>Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: the refugee camp* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1992), 37.

<sup>51</sup>Surin Maisrikrod, "Thailand's Policy Dilemmas Towards Indochina," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 14, no. 3, December 1992, p. 288.

between the imperialist expansionism of Great Britain and France. Whereas its Southeast Asian neighbors have had to overcome the social, political, and economic effects of colonization, Thailand steadfastly remained independent.<sup>52</sup>

The Royal Thai Government is the legacy of centuries of rule by Siamese kings. Chulalongkorn has been credited with modern reforms greatly influenced by Western political systems. He incorporated educated men into the ranks of leadership and shifted the absolute monarchy to one of patrimonial bureaucracy. At the time his successor, Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925) came to power, Thai nationalism was on the rise. The kingdom was a modern state, imbued with a sense of national identity.<sup>53</sup>

The absolute monarchical system of government came to an end in 1932. The last of the ruling monarchs, King Pradjadhipok (r. 1925-1935) was forced from his throne after a bloodless coup led by a university law professor, Pridi Phanomyon. Pridi was the leader of the radical right wing of the new provisional government, a constitutional monarchy. The coup was aimed at the royal ministers and not necessarily the institution of monarchy. Successive coups by various military and civilian authoritarians have vested political authority in the prime minister who serves as the head of the National Assembly. Yet, the monarchy to this day retains some symbolic importance and has yielded influence in state affairs as titular head of state. A patriotic slogan first coined by Vajiravudh, "Nation, Religion, King," has often been used as a national unifying theme for contemporary Thai policies.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: a short history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 181-3.

<sup>53</sup>John L.S. Girling, *Thailand: society and politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 54-7.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

The present king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, is immensely popular in Thailand. Born in the United States and educated in Switzerland, he returned to Bangkok in 1951 to occupy the throne. The Thais view him and Queen Sirikit as the "embodiment of religion, culture, and history."<sup>55</sup> He has lent political legitimacy to several government actions and continues to wield considerable influence with those in power despite being bipartisan and not involved with decision-making processes.

In constitutional Thailand, the succession of Thai authoritarians grappled for power with coups and counter-coups, sometimes referred to as "palace coups" for their bloodless quality. This era marked the domination of the military that struggled alternately with civilian leaders to retain power. To gain legitimacy for their rule, the Constitution was revised with each change of power.<sup>56</sup> Under Field Marshal Phibun, the propaganda used to consolidate his power was nationalism. He renamed the kingdom of Siam Muang Thai (Thailand) or Land of the Free in 1939.<sup>57</sup>

## **B. THAI POLITICAL CULTURE (1950-1990)**

The last forty odd years of Thai politics offer a glimpse into the two major motivations behind contemporary political and social thought, that of power, prestige, and wealth. This era was dominated by a strong military rather than a civilian government. Two reasons existed for this trend. The hierarchical nature of the army gave military rulers an edge over civilians autocrats that could not organize the warring factions into a consolidated power base. Parallel to this organizational edge, the military used the Communist insurgencies and anti-Communist rhetoric to legitimize their authoritarian rule.

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<sup>55</sup>Donald M. Seekins, "Historical Setting," in Barbara Leitch Le Poer, ed., Thailand: a country study, 6th ed. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 187.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 28-37.

The power struggle between the military and civilian leaders was intense. Because of the perceived Communist threat, decision-making was dominated by the military.<sup>58</sup> For the United States, Thailand was a strong linchpin against Communism in the region.

Thai leaders have shared a common trait. All have epitomized the traditional Thai love of power and wealth. "They find power seductive, alluring, irresistible, and even fascinating as long as the source of power is not an immediate, tangible threat."<sup>59</sup> It is imbued in Thai culture. From the days of the monarchical past, personal relationships and a client-patron system have governed how business is conducted. For a society based upon reverence for what power can achieve, it explains the continual ebb and flow of different leaders in Thailand. Komol Somwichien, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University describes what drives power politics:

Power, from the smallest degree to absolute power, can change a man's life...Those without power, such as the poor people or villagers, praise and respect persons according to their power.<sup>60</sup>

The love of wealth stems from what power can bring to the patron:

The Thai people perceive money and all other forms of wealth or property...a the most important and desirable aspect of life. Money is the most crucial factor determining the behavior of the Thai people.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Maisrikrod, "Thailand Policy Dilemmas Towards Indochina," p. 290.

<sup>59</sup>Sukhumband Paribatra, "Thailand's Interests and Policies," in Claude A. Buss, ed., National Security Interests in the Pacific Basin (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 217.

<sup>60</sup>Kamol Somwichien, Democracy and Thai Society (Bangkok: Thai Wathana, 1973), 58. Quoted by Girling, Thailand, 38.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 36-7. Quoted by Girling, Thailand, 142.

Supporting the United States against Communism was viewed as vital to Thai national security. Following their "weathervane" diplomacy, the Thais chose to align themselves with a strong power that could repel the spread of Communism. With the withdrawal of American forces from the Indochinese theatre in the early 1970s, the viewed the United States as a declining power. The U.S. loss in Vietnam shifted Thai perception of American might. While the Thais had been a strong ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, they pursued a policy of near neutrality between 1975-1979. After 1975, they looked to China as the big power in the region and pursued closer relations with Beijing. During these years, the Thais focused upon internal development and downplayed the politics of rivalry between the hegemons.<sup>62</sup> At the time of the first wave of refugees in 1975, then Prime Minister Kukrit was preoccupied with student dissidents, Communist insurgencies, and widespread domestic unrest. He was later replaced by General Kriangsak Chomanand in October 1977.<sup>63</sup> The winds shifted again when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia late December 1978. Once again, U.S.-Thai relations strengthened until the end of the Cold War. Bilateral defense agreements augmented the Thai arsenal and increased the presence of U.S. naval forces around Southeast Asia.

"For Thai leaders, the environment must provide security from landbased threats from the north, west, or east."<sup>64</sup> (The south is bordered by the Gulf of Thailand.) When the refugees came in droves across their border, the Thais were once again faced with external aggression, especially by the Vietnamese. The Thais were quick to contain the situation. As a result of the Vietnam War, Thailand had benefited enormously from the war economy. Following the boom years of the 1970s, the Thais did not want anything

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<sup>62</sup>Paribatra, "Thailand's Interests and Policies," 215.

<sup>63</sup>Seekins, "Historical Setting," 48-9.

<sup>64</sup>Paribatra, 215.

to discourage foreign investment, including refugees.<sup>65</sup> Uncontrolled refugee inflows would have created economic distress and disrupted their plans for internal development.

The history of refugee flows into Thailand reflects the turbulence caused by the Indochinese Wars and subsequent installations of Communist regimes. In the discussion that follow, the chronological events of refugee inflows into Thailand will be truncated into four time frames: 1975-1977, 1978-1982, 1982-1986, and 1986-present. These are general demarcations that show emerging trends in the demographic makeup of the refugees, Thai refugee policies, and international community response.<sup>66</sup>

From the Thai perspective, liberal asylum policies towards over one million refugees would have been disastrous to their economy, society, and national security. Despite their insistence on labeling all the refugee as illegal immigrants, the Thais granted a modicum of protection to the asylum-seekers. In 1975 at the onset of the refugee crisis, the Royal Thai government's official position on the refugees were:

Should any displaced persons attempt to enter the Kingdom, measures will be taken to send them out of the Kingdom as fast as possible. If it is not possible to repel them, they will be detained in camps...The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will act as coordinator with international organizations and contact the governments of Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam so as to ask them to repatriate their own nationals.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 37.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., she differentiates the Indochinese refugee flows into three waves. For this study, the time period 1986-present was added.

<sup>67</sup>RTG Cabinet Decision of 3 June 1975. Ministry of Interior, Indochinese Displaced Persons in Thailand. (Bangkok: Ministry of interior, 1980), 3. Quoted by Supang Chantavanich, Marisa Phupinyokul, Philip Finch, Saikaew Tipakorn, The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme from Thailand. Occasional Paper Series no. 003, Indochinese Refugee Information Center. (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992), 21.

In 1979, the RTG under Kriangsak changed its policies to "humane deterrence." Following its repeal in 1983, the stance in 1988 became more of what could be termed "benign intolerance."<sup>68</sup> Faced with the potential for domestic social and economic upheaval as outlined in caused by refugees on their borders, Thai officials employed methods contrary to the humanitarian mandate of the United Nations but satisfactory for ameliorating national security risks to themselves. The refugees were not allowed to leave the camps except as "refugee-warriors" Khmer Rouge fighting against the Vietnamese. Conditions within the camps were as spartan as possible in order to appease surrounding locals who lived with even less resources than some of the UNHCR and NGO supported refugees.

Components of the RTG successfully utilized the resources of the international community by receiving billions in humanitarian aid, of which a percentage went into their coffers. Furthermore, they refused to grant the refugees permanent asylum and called upon the Western countries to raise their quotas for immigration.

After nearly two decades, the RTG is impatient to be rid of the last Indochinese refugees. Slowly, durable solutions are ending the crisis. The withdrawal of the Vietnamese signaled a step in resolving the political crisis in Cambodia. Vietnamese refugees presently in residing in refugee camps have no other means but to go home. The Hmongs and Lowlander Laotians continue voluntary UNHCR-brokered repatriation. Thailand's juggling of these various refugee crises although not admirable, has certainly been astonishing. Although ethical aspects of Thai policy can be debated, its efficacy cannot.

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<sup>68</sup>This is a term coined by myself to describe the softened position from "humane deterrence." It is "benign" because refugees were no longer forced back to lethal conditions but "intolerance" because the RTG refused to entertain any thoughts that the refugees would be a permanent fixture within their country.





### III. THAILAND AND LAOS

#### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the push and pull factors effecting the policies of the RTG towards the Laotian refugees from 1975 to the present. Of the three Indochinese refugee groups that crossed into Thailand, the relationship between the Laos and Thais were significantly less confrontational. There are three major factors for this difference. Unlike the Vietnamese, the lowland Lao and Thais have blood-ties with common ancestors. "It is not often recognized by outsiders that there are more ethnic Lao living in Thailand than there are Lao living in Laos."<sup>69</sup> Second, the Pathet Lao Communists unlike the Vietnamese, do not threaten the territoriality of the Thais. Except for minor border disputes, the Thais were confident that a Lao invasion of Thailand was unlikely. Third, third-country resettlement to the West was a viable option because of past relations between the anti-Communist Laotians and the United States government. Most of the Lao were resettled to the United States. However, the Thais still do not want the Laotians to remain in their country and prefer repatriation as the final and durable solution.

There are two major ethnic groups from Laos that comprise the refugee populations. The lowland Lao are descended from the Lao-Tai peoples (as are modern day Thais and Shans in Burma) and comprise the majority of the population in Laos. Their ancestors had forced the indigenous Austronesian (Mon-Khmer) Kha tribes from the valleys of the Mekong River and settled in the plains about the thirteenth century. The Mon-Khmer either fled to surrounding areas of what are now Southern China, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam or became their slaves. This ethnic group has usually ruled Laos. The other ethnic groups that make up Laotians are the hilltribes or highland Hmong,

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<sup>69</sup>Netnapi Nakavachara and John Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," John Rogge, ed., *Refugees: a Third World dilemma* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield & Rowman, 1987), 279.

descendants of people who migrated from southern China in the mid nineteenth century. Other minorities include the Meos, Lu, and others. The lowlanders generally cultivate rice in the valleys. The hilltribes practice burn and slash agriculture in the hills.<sup>70</sup> The cultural diversity of Laos was a hindrance to national unity. The concept of nationalism did not gain momentum until the 1940s. As a result, their more powerful neighbors the Vietnamese and Siamese were in a constant power struggle over Laos.

Among its other problems, Laos has the misfortune of being geographically located in one of the most unstable regions in the world. Surrounded by Burma on its northwestern border, Communist China on its north, Vietnam on its eastern flank, Cambodia to the south, and Thailand to the west, Laos has been at the vortex of centuries of warfare. It is little wonder that stability and lasting peace have eluded this former kingdom for so long.<sup>71</sup>

## **B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

From as early as 1563 when the capital of Lan Xang as it was known then was moved from the Luang Prabang principality to Vientiane, the neighboring kingdoms of Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam fought over its suzerainty. In 1696, the king became a vassal of the Vietnamese in order to oust the pro-Siamese usurpers. This power struggle between Siam and Vietnam continued until the French colonized the area known as Indochina in 1884. Laos was prized as a possible overland trade route to China. Although this was never fully developed, a lucrative opium trade originated in the area known as the

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<sup>70</sup>Guy Moréchand, "The Many Languages and Cultures of Laos," in Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, eds., Laos: war and revolution, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), 30-1.

<sup>71</sup>Richard S.D. Hawkins, "Contours, Cultures, and Conflict," in Adams and McCoy, Laos: war and revolution, 4.

Golden Triangle (northern Laos, northeastern Thailand, and eastern Burma). The French-held protectorate was seized by the Japanese in March 1945.<sup>72</sup>

When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the rivalry between Thailand and Vietnam which had lain dormant during French colonial rule reawakened. Alongside this rivalry was an emerging nationalism within Laos that was realized with full independence from French in 1950. The different factions that emerged were the Royalists, neutralists, and Communists, or Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao (literally "State of Laos") attempted to declare itself the only true government in 1953. During the next four decades, the different factions could never comprise to achieve national unity. Of the three groups, social change only interested the Pathet Lao, even if it meant alliance with the Viet Minh. The other factions were mistrustful of the Viet Minh and disinterested in incorporating all the ethnic and religious groups into the government. The original aims of the Pathet Lao were total liberation and unity of Laos. As partial payment for providing military support of the Pathet Lao, the Vietminh gained territorial control over a part of Laos.<sup>73</sup>

The tilt of the Pathet Lao towards Vietnam alarmed the Thais. During the colonial era, the French had encouraged closer ties between the Laotians and the Vietnamese. In the post-independence years, the Thais were once again outside the sphere of influence. After Eisenhower's Domino Speech, the United States positioned strategic forces in Thailand at their bequest.<sup>74</sup> The Thais were determined to keep Communism from spreading into their capitalist, pro-Western economy. Practicing age-old "weathervane" and pragmatic philosophy, the RTG relied heavily on U.S. support. For the next thirty years following the post-colonial Indochina, the struggle between the United States and the

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<sup>72</sup>Philippe Devillers, "The Laotian Conflict in Perspective," in Adams and McCoy, Laos: war and revolution, 37.

<sup>73</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 32.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

Soviet Union was fought in their backyard. Ironically, had there been less technologically advanced weaponry introduced by superpower presence, the civil wars may have been localized and certainly less lethal. Without U.S. or Soviet backing there might not have been the volume of refugees fleeing the war-ravaged countries of Indochina.

### **C. THE FIRST WAVE (1975-1977)**

Post-independence Laos never saw a peaceful or stable government despite attempts by all sides to form a coalition government of Royalists, neutralists, and Communists in the early 1970s. When the actual takeover by the Communist Laotian People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) of Vientiane on 2 December 1975, the coup created a mass exodus of refugees. Up until then, the civil war had produced plenty of internal refugees, or displaced persons but each side had provided pockets of safe havens for their populations as well as commitment from both camps to maintain fighting. The American bombing missions often had forced internal migrations to remote areas or refugee camps but had not caused significant spillovers into neighboring countries. It had been in the interests of both sides to keep their populations from exiting. The fall of Vientiane signaled an end for the pro-American side and so Laotians fled for their lives.<sup>75</sup>

During the war, most of the CIA-backed supporters were the Hmong, a large ethnic minority group that inhabited the mountainous regions of Laos. They were recruited in large numbers during the war for two reasons. Many Hmong were economically motivated by the aid and salaries provided by the U.S. government.<sup>76</sup> As guerrillas against the communist Pathet Lao, they fought with American troops and helped retrieve downed

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<sup>75</sup>Paul Rabé, Voluntary Repatriation: the case of Hmong in Ban Vinai. Occasional Paper Series no. 2, Indochinese Refugee Information Center (IRIC). (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1990), 25.

<sup>76</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 34.

American pilots. Additionally, the Hmong wanted to preserve their culture against the communists. The Hmong are a semi-nomadic peoples that practice slash and burn agriculture, thus forcing them to migrate in search of fertile ground. They have deeply embedded cultural beliefs that promote this environmentally degrading method of farming. Without the burning, they do not feel crops will grow. Their family system revolves around a hierarchical clan-like society.<sup>77</sup> When the Pathet Lao came to power, the Hmong were particularly singled out for persecution and attrition.

The 44,659 Hilltribe Lao (Hmong, Yao, Mien, and Htin et al) and over 10,000 Lowland Lao in 1975<sup>78</sup> marked the first wave (1975-1977) of Laotian refugees into Thailand. The Highlander Hmong, who are not culturally close to the traditional ethnic Lao (Lowlanders), went to the Ban Vinai (Loei province), Chiang Kham (Phayao province), Sob Tuang (Nan province), Chiang Khong (Chiang Rai province), and Ban Nam Yao (Nan province) refugee camps. The Lowlanders went to Ban Pho and the Nong Saeng Screening Center. (By 1991, there were only three major camps, Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham, and Ban Pho as well as the Phanat Nikhom and Nong Saeng Processing Centers.)<sup>79</sup> Among the Lowland Lao were uprooted ethnic minorities, civil servants, Chinese businessmen, and Vietnamese employees.<sup>80</sup> They fled from imprisonment in re-

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<sup>77</sup>Rabé, Voluntary Repatriation: the case of the Hmong in Ban Vinai, 25.

<sup>78</sup>Chantavanich et al., 3.

<sup>79</sup>Thomas M. Foglietta, Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs, Refugees and Asylum-Seekers From Laos: prospects for resettlement and repatriation, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., 1991, p. 2. (As a member of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific, Mr. Foglietta chaired a fact-finding mission to Thailand and Laos. This study was written by him and reflect his personal views and not necessarily those of the Foreign Affairs Committee or its Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.)

<sup>80</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 36.

education camps, indiscriminate killings of suspected insurgents, and deteriorating economic conditions from collectivized agriculture and a war torn country.

Year	Lowland Lao	Hilltribe	Total
1975	10,195	44,659	54,854
1976	19,499	7,266	26,765
1977	18,070	3,873	21,943
1978	48,781	8,013	56,794
1979	22,045	23,943	45,988
1980	28,967	14,801	43,768
1981	16,377	4,356	20,733
1982	3,203	1,816	5,019
1983	4,571	2,920	7,491
1984	14,616	3,627	18,243
1985	12,388	623	13,011
1986	-	4,223	4,223
1987	-	-	-
1988	-	1,323	1,323
1989	-	-	-
1990	-	-	-
1991	-	-	-
1992	-	-	-
Total	198,712	121,443	320,155
Source: UNHCR, Bangkok (June 1992) in "The Lao Returnees," Chantavanich et al., 11.			

Table 3. Number of Lao Asylum-Seekers in Thailand

Thai policy towards the refugees was closely linked to the response of the United States. Clearly as a result of the American pullout in Indochina, the Highland Hmong had

the most to lose. However, when offered resettlement in the United States, many preferred to stay along the porous border camps.<sup>81</sup> Of all the camps, Ban Vinai has been the most "open" in terms of allowing movement in and out, although it was officially closed to newcomers after 1983. It has served as a base for guerrilla insurgency movements against the Communist Lao government led by General Vang Pao and his officers who were resettled in the United States but conducted an insurgency movement nonetheless. Many of the Hmong believed he would return and remained in the camps instead of resettling to a third country. Another factor believed to have discouraged resettlement was the difficulty of integrating into Western societies by those Hmong that chose this option.<sup>82</sup> The United States was the primary country of resettlement. Among this first wave group were the educated, those with close ties to the U.S. government, and those with family connections. Americans felt a particular obligation to their former allies.<sup>83</sup>

During this first wave, the numbers of Laotian refugees did not pose a national security risk to Thailand. The numbers were still manageable. The RTG declared them as illegal immigrants unless they passed a screening process conducted by the UNHCR that differentiated between refugees and economic migrants. This screening process was supposed to deter non-refugees, who were forcibly returned at the border, but in reality had little impact on the numbers of asylum-seekers. (The screening process was abandoned in March 1978). Asylum-seekers that were afforded refugee status had

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<sup>81</sup>In 1975, 1% (454 of 44,659) Hilltribe refugees chose resettlement. The other 99% chose to be "longstayers" (those that stayed in refugee camps for over a decade). In 1976, 9.7% (4,593 of 46,878) and 1977, 5.1% (2,481 of 48,270) chose resettlement. No refugees were repatriated. From Rabé, Voluntary Repatriation: the case of the Hmong in Ban Vinai, Table 1.

<sup>82</sup>Zolberg et al., Escape from Violence, 169.

<sup>83</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 38-9.



prospects for third-country resettlement. Despite any label they were accorded, the refugees were not granted permanent asylum in Thailand. If they were determined to seek asylum, the Thais were determined that other countries like the United States would take responsibility for a permanent solution. NGOs and the UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance in the way of staff and funds. The Thais provided some staff and military, but the burden of maintaining the camps fell on international aid agencies.

The RTG allowed the refugee camps to exist and looked the other way as the Hmong resistance fighters went back and forth between borders. The Thais allowed this type of loose refugee status because the Hmong were not interested in permanent resettlement within Thailand. This class of "refugee-warrior" also developed in the Cambodian camps.<sup>84</sup> The Hmong still harbored hopes of toppling the Communists in Vientiane.

The Lowland Lao, who are ethnically similar to the ruling class in Laos did not have a desire to be refugee-warriors. Their motivations for crossing into Thailand were largely the promise of resettlement and better economic opportunities. As in Vietnam, a large number of the first wave of refugees were ethnic Chinese and American sympathizers who were encouraged by the new regime to leave. This initial exodus was not hindered because it lessened tensions and rivalries. By the end 1977, over 100,000 Laotian asylum-seekers had crossed into Thailand.

#### **D. THE SECOND WAVE (1978-1982)**

Push factors in Laos included worsened economic conditions from the Communist regime's agricultural collectivization schemes, taxation policies, conscription, as well as overall human rights abuses. Flooding followed the drought of 1977. Added to these factors was the refusal by the LPRP of any developmental aid from the West. In 1978, the trend of refugees leaving Laos reversed itself. Approximately 35,000 more Laotians

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<sup>84</sup>Zolberg et al., Escape from Violence, 169.

left in 1978 than in 1977. It raised well-founded speculations that economics combined with the potential of resettlement drove the largest outflows of Laotians seeking asylum.<sup>85</sup>

Thailand's response to this second inflow of Laotians was tied to the overall tensions created by war in Southeast Asia. In 1978, Cambodia was invaded by Vietnam and caused a massive dislocation of Cambodians over the border into Thailand. Economics and politics drove thousands of ethnic Chinese Hoa and pro-American Vietnamese from Vietnam over land and by sea into Thailand. In 1979, the Sino-Vietnamese War spilled over into Laos. As allies with the Vietnamese, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) allowed more Vietnamese advisors and troops into Laos. More than 128,000 Laos crossed into Thailand between 1978-1982.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, Thai domestic politics drove refugee policy. In October 1977, General Kriangsak Choanand led a coup and toppled the civilian government of Thanin Kraivichien whose shortlived prime ministership was plagued by communist insurgency movements. Kriangsak came to power at a time when Thailand was undergoing an economic crisis from the second oil crisis.<sup>87</sup> Communist insurgencies and deteriorated economic conditions did not create an atmosphere of welcome for the refugees.

During this second wave of refugees, Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees also began to migrate into Thailand to escape war, communism, and starvation. The refugees were articulated as threats to national security by government officials. The threats were classified into five categories:

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<sup>85</sup>Long, *Ban Vinai*, 40.

<sup>86</sup>Chantavanich et al., *The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme from Thailand*, 5.

<sup>87</sup>Barbara Leitch LePoer, ed. *Thailand: a country study* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1987), 48-9.

1. Threat to the administration and governing system. A large number of refugees staying together sometimes create problems, such as drugs and crime. And the allocation of large areas of land for refugees also causes discontent among the Thai locals who have no farmland of their own.
2. Political problem. Some refugees are members of the old regime who continue to fight against the present regime. Although the government does not support the opposition groups, the continuous fighting may cause misunderstanding between Thailand and Laos. Moreover, even though the government has tried its best, Thailand always been unfairly criticized for mistreating the refugees by human rights groups.
3. Economic problem. The government has to allocate some of its personnel and budget for administering the camps. Additionally, when the government has to buy large quantities of supplies from the local market, local people suffer from price fluctuations.
4. Social problem. Some Thai villagers are jealous that refugees are better treated and supported. This may cause severe societal conflict between locals and refugees in the future.
5. Security problem. When certain groups of refugees continue their fight against the Indochinese government, Thai villagers who live along the border are put in danger, especially as sometimes the fighting lures the Laotian army to cross the border into Thailand in order to suppress the opposition groups. Furthermore among the refugees themselves, there have been some who have tried to arouse ill-feeling within the Laotian group against the Thai government.<sup>88</sup>

Kriangsak and his government reviewed and altered existing refugee policy. Although Western countries were accepting refugees for resettlement, the second wave's

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<sup>88</sup>Chantavanich et al., *The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme*, 20-1. Excerpt of five threat categories from government publications and officials on refugees, Kasit Bhiroun, "Discussions on the Indochinese Refugees 1988-1990" (Thesis of National Defence College, 1990), 2-5.

large numbers overwhelmed the Thais. At the height of this second crisis, there were twenty-one refugee camps as well as transiting, processing, and detention centers. More refugees were coming into Thailand than were leaving. Although the UNHCR as well as voluntary agencies (Volags) and other NGOs were willing to bear most of the burden of maintaining the camps, the RTG felt a lagging interest by Western countries. Their greatest fear was that the refugees would stay in Thailand permanently. In April and May 1979, the Thais instituted a push-back policy to physically prevent any refugees from coming into Thailand.<sup>89</sup> Those that tried to come by sea were also pushed back, drowned, or held in detention centers with minimum standards of humanitarian assistance.

The Thais were soundly condemned by Western governments and the media. The Thai press criticized the West for not accepting more refugees. Spurred by the callous actions of the Thais, the first Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees met in July 1979. This UN conference was attended by sixty-five countries including the Soviet Union. They pledged more than "\$160 US million and twenty countries agreed to resettle 260,000 refugees."<sup>90</sup> The RTG was successful in regaining Western commitment.

By 1980, Laos was critically dependent on foreign aid. The LDPR had also reversed its policies of collectivized agriculture. Despite this, many Laos sought relief from one of the poorest economies in the world. The Thais shifted away from resettlement as a durable solution to repatriation. Laos was the first government to broker a repatriation program with the UNHCR.

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<sup>89</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 41.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 42.

However, prior to 1989, the repatriation programme had not been very successful and with the exception of 1987 when there were 1,069 returnees, the annual number of returnees during the period 1980-1988 had been less than 300.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike the Cambodians or Vietnamese, even the UNHCR in Bangkok felt Laotians were motivated by the lure of economics and resettlement opportunities. Persecution under the Protocol was not readily apparent in their claims for asylum. The new government under General Prem Tinsulanonda was even more impatient to discourage further refugee inflows. (The recession in Thailand forced the Kriangsak regime to resign in 1980.) Partially as a result of UNHCR recommendations, the concept of "humane deterrence" came into being.<sup>92</sup>

The Bangkok office of the UNHCR and UNHCR headquarters disagreed in the methods for discouraging Laotians seeking asylum. Previous attempts had failed at any comprehensive screening programs. UNHCR Bangkok finally suggested that new arrivals would not automatically be screened for resettlement. The Volags activities would also be curtailed.<sup>93</sup> This was to accomplish several things. The lowered possibilities for resettlement was to discourage the Lowland Laos from exiting. Unlike the Hmong, they were not the target of discriminatory or retaliatory policies by the ruling government. Additionally, Volags were often more enthusiastic in helping the refugees than the indigenous population. The local population often fared under worse conditions than the refugees in the camps. At the height of the refugee crisis, the Committee for Coordination

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<sup>91</sup>Chantavanich et al., Laotian Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme, 16.

<sup>92</sup>Dennis McNamara, "Humane Deterrence in South-east Asia," in Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, eds., Refugees and International Relations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 126.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*

of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) recorded fifty-two Volags working in refugee camps all over Thailand.<sup>94</sup>

This concept of "humane deterrence" was quickly absorbed and modified by the RTG. In an ironic twist, "humane deterrence" was anything but humane. The Thai National Security Council announced in July 1981 that camps would be consolidated despite the overcrowded conditions that would surely result. The Thai Ministry of Interior was responsible for execution of these policies that included restricting resettlement opportunities, decreased rations, and renewed attempts to refuse entry into Thailand.<sup>95</sup>

Reaction was mixed in the United States. As the primary country of their resettlement, the U.S. government did not want to institutionalize refugee immigration. The Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy cautiously endorsed "humane deterrence" as a "new approach" to dealing with Indochinese refugee flows.<sup>96</sup> Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Sheppard Lowman was more candid, "in spite of difficulties, we have encouraged the Thai in this initiative [of humane deterrence]."<sup>97</sup> The NGOs that worked in the refugee camps did not support the Thai policies but did not have much recourse. Whether or not humane deterrence was actually responsible for the decreased numbers of refugees, or other factors caused the reduced flows, the statistics reflect its intent.<sup>98</sup> The Thais would like to credit their policy, but it was worth noting that economic and political conditions also improved in Laos. By the end of 1982, the numbers dropped by over 15,000 from the previous year.

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<sup>94</sup>Long, *Ban Vinai*, 45.

<sup>95</sup>McNamara, "Humane Deterrence in South-east Asia," 127.

<sup>96</sup>Long, 48.

<sup>97</sup>McNamara, 128.

<sup>98</sup>Robert P. DeVecchi, "Politics and Policies of 'First Asylum' in Thailand," in *World Refugee Report--1982* (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1982), 22.

### E. THE THIRD WAVE (1982-1986)

This period marked the greatest numbers of Laotian refugees drawn to the Thai refugee camps in hopes of resettlement. By this time, many had been resettled in the West and former refugees were sponsoring relatives. It was also marked by a stalemate quality resulting from all the refugee-receiving states' growing reluctance to accept more refugees and the attraction of emigration to the West for the poverty-stricken Laotians. Neither the UNHCR nor Thailand felt the stable population of about 55,000 Laotian Hilltribes and Lowlanders would easily disappear. Humanitarian assistance, mostly funded by the West was not decreasing. In 1981, UNHCR alone had contributed over \$68 US million to Thailand for overall refugee relief. By December 1982, the resettlement countries had accepted more a total of 1,214,659 Indochinese (Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) refugees. The United States alone granted asylum to 616,778 refugees.<sup>99</sup>

The RTG maintained pressure on the United States and other asylum countries to continue providing resettlement quotas and paying for the humanitarian assistance efforts within Thailand. U.S. politicians reflected the divided American citizenry's opinion on assisting Southeast Asian refugees. There was a growing domestic backlash against all refugees, not just the ones from Southeast Asia. For those that supported generous immigration policies felt we had a moral obligation to continue offering permanent asylum. Senator Mark O. Hatfield from Oregon emphasized Thailand as an important ally in a critical area of the world. We were still heavily engaged in the Cold War and Southeast Asia was one of many theatres. U.S. refugee policy was a tool of diplomacy towards Thailand. It helped maintain good relations with a non-Communist country while

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<sup>99</sup>Zarjevski, *A Future Preserved*, 190.

serving as a base of operations for locating Missing-in-Action (MIAs) and counter-narcotics enforcement in the "Golden Triangle" of Burma and Laos.<sup>100</sup>

UNHCR backed repatriation as the best durable solution for the Laotians. However, many Hmong did not want to return for fear of reprisals for participating in the insurgency movements. They wanted to go back to Laos only under "pre-1975" conditions. The Lowlanders preferred the refugee camps and hopes of resettlement over eking out a living in the LDPR. In 1983, "humane deterrence" had been lifted although the policies did not alter dramatically. In 1985, a more stringent and formal screening process was set up by the UNHCR. Criteria for being accepted as a refugee were:

- former civil servants, soldiers and policemen of the government who were employed prior to the revolution in Laos; persons who worked for embassies, international organizations of foreign private companies prior to the revolution in Laos.
- persons who participated in political, administrative or social activities deemed to be antagonistic to the present Laotian Government; persons who have direct relatives in third countries, i.e., father, mother, son and daughter<sup>101</sup>

Part of the initial failure of the Voluntary Program (instituted in 1980) was the inability of the LDPR regime or the UNHCR to convince returnees to repatriate. Many Hilltribes looked towards their leaders in making decisions. Rumors were rife that returnees were killed or detained by the government. The Lowlanders simply wanted to wait for resettlement. The Thais were extremely anxious to be rid of them. By the end of this period, they had hosted large populations for over a decade.

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<sup>100</sup>Mark O. Hatfield, "U.S. Refugee Policy and Southeast Asia: time for a renewed commitment," in World Refugee Survey--1984 (Washington D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1984), 29.

<sup>101</sup>Chantavanich et al., The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme, 21. Stated in The Public Affairs Foundation, Indochinese Refugees in Thailand: prospects for longstayers (Bangkok: Innomedia, 1989), 29.



## F. 1986-PRESENT

During this period, only a small number (approx 4,500) of Hilltribe Lao were recognized as refugees by the UNHCR and Thailand in 1986 and 1988. Overall, push factors within Laos had decreased significantly. Collectivized agriculture was abandoned and most of the Vietnamese advisors returned to Vietnam. Relations between Laos and Thailand warmed as the Thais shifted to a more moderate stance on the refugees from push-backs and humane deterrence. In 1988, the Thai Secretary General of the National Security Council announced a softer stance of its policies:

Thailand will continue to provide assistance to refugees, in accordance with humanitarian principles and in conjunction with the preservation of our sovereignty, national interest and national security. Refugees will be allowed to seek temporary refuge in Thailand while they await resettlement in third countries or repatriation to their respective countries of origin. The Royal Thai Government does not have the policy of allowing refugees to permanently settle in Thailand.<sup>102</sup>

In 1989-90, the RTG, LDPR, and UHNCR engaged in the Tripartite Meetings which reflected improving relations between the two countries. The voluntary repatriation program which had been in effect officially since 1980 began to be implemented in earnest.<sup>103</sup> The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) that resulted from the Second Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees in June 1989 also contributed to providing durable solutions for the remaining refugees. The governments of both refugee-receiving

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<sup>102</sup>Chantavanich et al., The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme from Thailand, 21. Statement made at the 1988 CCSDPT Conference in Bangkok by Suwit Suthanakul, Secretary General of the National Security Council.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

and refugee-generating countries endorsed screening procedures for refugees, voluntary repatriation, and resettlement for all the refugees in Thailand.<sup>104</sup>

The RTG was determined to be rid of all refugees by the end of 1994 although this seems improbable at present. The "Outline of the Plan for a Phased Repatriation and Reintegration of Laotians in Thailand" from the Tripartite meetings clearly plan to close down the camps and send the Laotians back home. Secretary General Suwit Suthanukul made this evident to Representative Foglietta of the Committee on Foreign Affairs during a fact-finding mission in July 1991.<sup>105</sup> In October 1993 at the 44th meeting of the Executive Committee of the UNCHR in Geneva, the present Thai Secretary General Charan Kunlawanit relayed problems in repatriating the remaining 33,000 Lao refugees. Among problems cited were subversive activities against the government by some refugee-warriors and the difficulties in absorbing and reintegrating the refugees into society.<sup>106</sup>

Fueled perhaps by the end of the Cold War and the LPRP's recognition that foreign aid and an open market economy is the only hope for Laos' development, the root problems of Laotians refugee generation are slowly being resolved. The UNHCR and other NGOs are actively engaged within Laos. Current development projects include "construction and equipping of schools and dispensaries; the construction or repair of irrigation, reservoirs, canals and water-gates; the provision of tools, seeds and other inputs

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<sup>104</sup>Foglietta, "Refugees and Asylum-Seekers from Laos: prospects for resettlement and repatriation," 3.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>106</sup>Foreign Broadcast Information Service(FBIS)-WEU-93-1 Daily Report 13 October 1993, "Thai Official Views Refugee Policy at UNHCR Meeting," Bangkok Radio Thailand Network. 10 October 1993.

for agriculture; and the provision of equipment, teaching aids and scholarships for vocational training for young urban returnees."<sup>107</sup>

Despite the remaining numbers of Laotian refugees, the Hmong and Lowlanders are repatriating for two reasons. Many realize after being "screened out" as true refugees, chances for third-country resettlement are very slim. Additionally, conditions in Laos including amnesty for those who renounce insurgency against the regime and slow but increased economic development are strong pull-factors for people who have been housed in refugee camps for over a decade. For Hmong, especially, who are inclined to follow the edicts of their clan leaders, there are doubts that Laos will ever return to the ways of "pre-1975." This recurring wish is becoming a dying dream as hopes for toppling the Communists seem unlikely. The Lowlanders, who do not have the political or ethnic enmity against the current government, are being retrained for jobs required for a market economy. The LPDR government wants to attract foreign investment and tourism.<sup>108</sup>

Approximately 18,000 Lao refugees remained in Thailand by the end of September 1994. Although most recognize they must return to Laos, there have been incidents of refusal by remaining refugees. The Thai Interior Ministry, the responsible agency for the overall refugee program, has alternated between cajoling and threats to repatriate or resettle the longstayers. Threats have included cutting off money from overseas relatives and moving remaining refugees to other parts of Thailand without UNHCR or NGO access. Deputy Permanent Interior Secretary Chaloe Phromloet gave a deadline of 30 September 1994 for refugees to sign-up for the repatriation program. For the refugees that comply, this means an assistance package including money, necessities, and food. After the deadline, they would be treated as illegal immigrants and treated accordingly. One

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<sup>107</sup>Chantavanich et al., The Lao Returnees in the Voluntary Repatriation Programme from Thailand, 19.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

hindrance to this repatriation policy has been resistance among the longstayer leaders who have persuaded their fellow refugees to resist repatriation.<sup>109</sup> They still hope for third-country resettlement.

For the refugees that do go back to Laos, there are welcoming ceremonies attended by representatives of the UNHCR, RTG, and LDPR. They are given time to acclimate in the reception centers before being transported along with an assistance package to their designated province. Once in Laos, the refugees are subject to the laws of the Laotian government. There have not been any widespread reports of human rights abuses for the returning refugees.<sup>110</sup>

The LDPR and RTG governments are working closely in new economic ventures. Tourism is an expanding area of the Lao economy with the opening of Laos to foreign visitors in 1989. Other joint ventures include a special economic zone in Vientiane<sup>111</sup> and the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge (financed by the Australians), the first bridge to span the Mekong River that was originally planned to be built thirty years ago. The RTG views the economic potential of closer relations with their traditional former enemy as good for Thailand. Foreign investment in Laos is on the rise, with Thailand being its biggest investor.<sup>112</sup> For the 4.4 million Laos, in one of the poorest countries in the world, a lasting peace has improved their lot from the days of the Indochinese wars.

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<sup>109</sup>FBIS-EAS-94-174 Daily Report 5 September 1994, "Lao Refugees Urged to Join Repatriation Plan," *Nation* (Bangkok), 5 September 1994, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup>Human rights groups like Amnesty International, Asia Watch, and USCR regularly send reports of human rights violations from Burma and Cambodia (mainly Khmer Rouge), but Laos and Vietnam have a vested interest in promoting a successful voluntary repatriation program to the international community.

<sup>111</sup>FBIS-EAS-94-150 Daily Report 4 August 1994, "Economic Zone Agreement Signed with Thai Firm," *Vientiane Times*, 15-21 July 1994, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>112</sup>Gordon Fairclough, "Spanning the Divide," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 21 April 1994, p. 23.

## G. CONCLUSION

From 1975 to 1994, more than 360,000 Laotians have sought refuge in Thailand. There is little doubt that the first wave of refugees were true victims of persecution from the newly formed Communist regime. Of the latter waves, there is little doubt that economics was the push factor rather than political persecution that drove them across the Mekong River into Thailand.<sup>113</sup> Push factors including re-education camps and a plummeting socialized economy were exacerbated by the instability of the insurgency movements within Laos. Rather than live under such impoverished conditions, the Laotians viewed life in the refugee camps to be preferable to living in Laos.<sup>114</sup>

Thai reaction to the influx has wavered from benign tolerance, to humane deterrence, to voluntary repatriation. For a country inundated by more than one million Indochinese refugees, feelings of impatience and frustration against them are not unwarranted. The Thais have been justly criticized and praised for their alternating refugee policies. Of the three Indochinese refugee groups, the Laotians received the best reception because of the ethnic similarities and bilateral relations between Bangkok and Vientiane.

At this juncture, the international community including the UNHCR and countries of resettlement are anxious for the Laotian camps to close their doors for a final time. Since the Thais adamantly refused permanent asylum to the refugees, the durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and resettlement are the only answers. Since the stability of the LDPR government has been established with renewed economic vigor and warming

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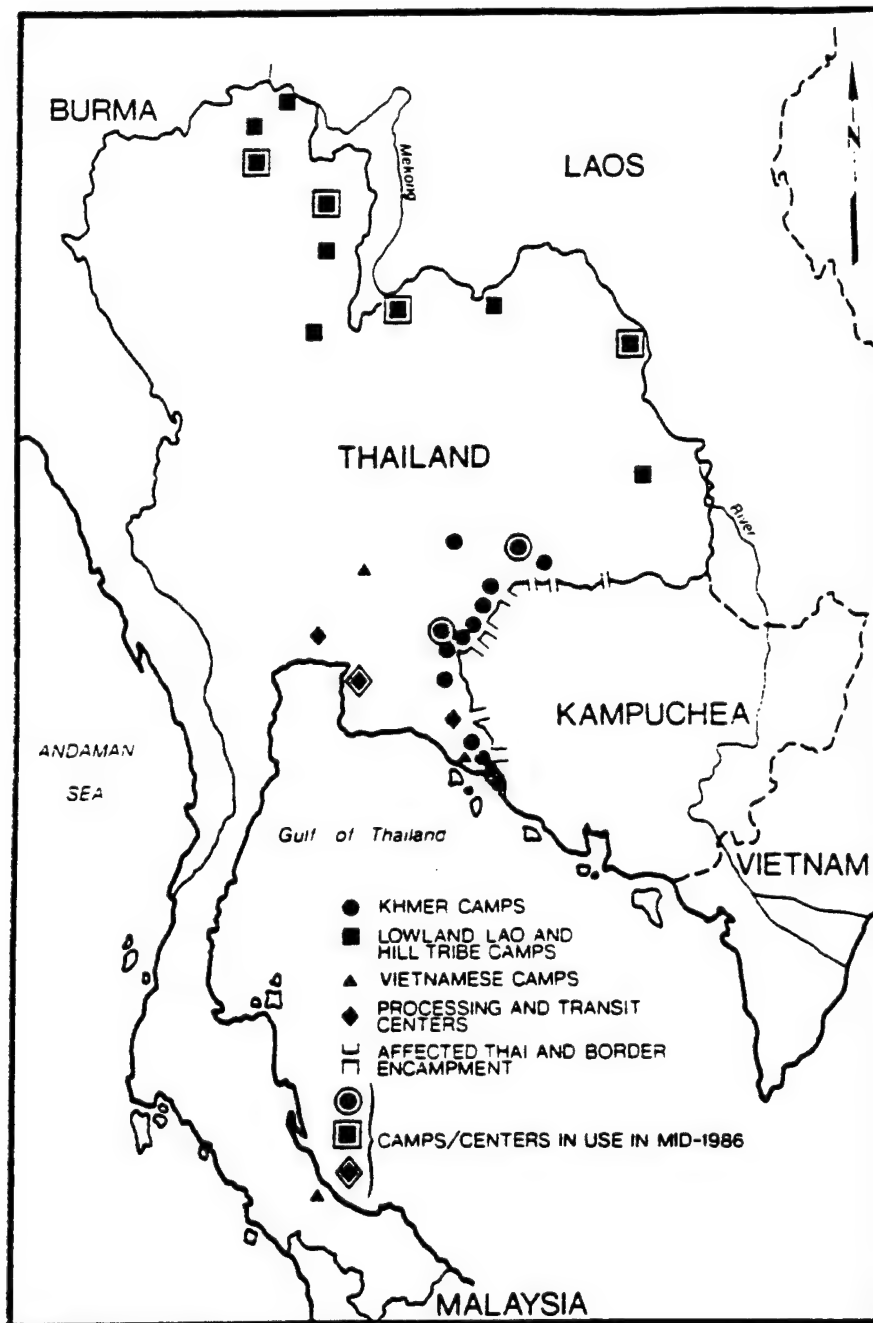
<sup>113</sup>Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," 273.

<sup>114</sup>In an interview with Craig Etchison, executive director of the Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, July 1994, Washinton, D.C., he reported of widespread communication from the Laotian refugee camps to relatives and friends back in Laos. The message was clear. Life in the refugee camps were better than living conditions in Laos. This was a clear pull factor in the rise in refugees during the second wave.

relations with foreign investors, the remaining longstayers no longer have a "well-founded fear" of persecution. Those that wait too long for a better option will lose out in the end.

The RTG itself has undergone many changes in the past two decades. Several coups and coup attempts, a thriving economy, and a growing democracy movement have also changed the character of Thai rule. The refugee situation is a diminishing threat to national security threat. Despite the harshness with which the Thais reacted against the "illegal immigrants" from Laos, they have emerged through the crisis without any major domestic upheavals directly related to the refugee crises. Economics was both a push and pull factor with the Lowland Lao. It was widely believed by the RTG, UNCHR, and U.S. observers that the refugees during the second wave were economic migrants.

Thailand has taken a pragmatic approach to its communist neighbors in Laos. As socialist regimes become open to Western-style open market economies, we should not be deterred from investing in those countries. With the end of the Cold War, Castro's Cuba is no longer a threat to the sovereignty of the United States. The voice of a small but powerful lobby group from Cuban expatriates should not direct our foreign policy. Let the United States learn a lesson from the Thais. Choose pragmatism over idealism.



Map 3. Location of Refugee Camps/Centers During Peak Influx Period

## IV. THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

### A. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the relationship between the Royal Thai Government, Cambodian refugees and the politics of international relief will be explored. When examining this relationship, there are several factors that distinguish its dynamics from the other refugee crises of Laos or Vietnam. The Cambodian crisis was borne of politics rather than economic or social reasons. It also produced the largest number of refugees on Thailand's borders. The crisis of Cambodia had far reaching regional and international ramifications.<sup>115</sup>

The backdrop of the Vietnamese invasion effected a regional crisis involving not only Thailand but the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). On the state level, the invasion heightened age-old interstate tensions between the Vietnamese and Thais. Cambodia under Hanoi's influence, long seen as a buffer state between the two countries, became a new source of threat to the national security of the RTG. ASEAN, formed by anti-Communist, open market economy states felt threatened by the aggression of Vietnam. The United States, China, and the Soviet Union provided the behind-the-scenes support for the ideological struggle. Amidst these state players, the individual leaders that dominated the political picture not only exacerbated the refugee crisis, but were personally responsible.

Another factor unique to the Cambodian crisis was the politicization of humanitarian aid. Because the refugees included guerrilla factions of the Khmer Rouge that relied heavily on international aid, there were moral, ethical, and political dilemmas

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<sup>115</sup>The name Kambuja was given to the kingdom by Jayarvarman II. The French version was Cambodge, or Cambodia in English. Under the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese-backed Communists, it was renamed Kampuchea. Cambodia has always been the favored name by anti-Communists and is the name presently used by the coalition government in Phnom Penh.



facing the donor aid countries and agencies. Added to this melee were the Thai military factions and Vietnamese-backed government in the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) that skimmed humanitarian aid into their pockets.

As background for understanding the roots of the Cambodian crisis, it will be necessary to give an historical account of the players and events that precipitated and continued the migration of almost 400,000 Cambodians across Thailand's borders. Figuring prominently throughout the crisis is Prince Sihanouk, the controversial but highly charismatic leader of the Cambodian people. Other key players are Pol Pot of the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese-backed leader Heng Samrin, president of the People's Republic of Kampuchea and its prime minister, Hun Sen. The Thai military is a prominent component of this analysis. They were often at odds with other factions of the RTG and the international community that further complicated the existing political turmoil surrounding the future of Cambodia. Politics, therefore, was the greatest obstacle for the Thai government in resolving the refugee crisis.

As for the refugees, large numbers of internally displaced people were generated with the fall of the Lon Nol government in 1975 and subsequent takeover by the Khmer Rouge. The refugees that fled during this first wave relatively small until the invasion by the Vietnamese in 1978. The majority were trapped within Cambodia. The refugee crisis on the Thai-Cambodian border lasted until 1993 when the refugees were repatriated as the conclusion to the Paris Peace Accords of 1989. The Cambodian elections monitored by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) resulted in a fragile coalition government. Since the UN-brokered elections, the coalition government has tried to foster peace among the factions and rebuild a country devastated by decades of civil war. Although it is a country rich in human and natural resources, it is merely speculation whether Cambodia will ever return to its former glory or sustain its fragile peace. For neighboring Thailand, maintaining stability on its eastern flank is a major national security concern.

## B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The kingdom of Cambodia reached its cultural and political zenith during the Angkor period (A.D. 802-1431). With the temple city complex of Angkor Wat as its cultural center, the Khmer people built an empire rivaling its neighbors. This golden age went into precipitous decline as the Thais spread into its western borders. This marked a long struggle for independence and sovereignty as Cambodia became the center of a power struggle between the Thais and Vietnamese. Although the Thais and Khmer shared a common culture, the invading Thais were cruel and repressive to their vassals. They wanted loyalty and tribute. The Vietnamese viewed them as barbarians to be conquered and subjugated. As a result, the fear of racial extinction in Cambodian thought persisted throughout the history of Cambodia, especially with the invasion of Vietnamese in 1978.<sup>116</sup>

During the French Colonial Period (1887-1953), the French contributed to the eventual sovereignty of Cambodia. The preservation of Khmer culture and identity had been threatened by the forced relocation of thousands of its populace to Thailand until Thailand itself became threatened by Western imperial presence. The French restoration of Angkor Wat led to a renewed awakening of the Cambodian cultural conscience.<sup>117</sup>

Under French rule, a series of cooperative monarchs that served as religious patron figureheads were installed. The power was vested in the French-controlled bureaucracy. Even the mid-grade civil servants were Vietnamese, chosen over their Cambodian counterparts who comprised the lowest echelons. This lack of bureaucratic experience by Cambodians would add to the downfall of post-colonial governments. Cambodian monarchs were also left out of the ruling clique. Both elements of the modern state of Cambodia therefore did not have a tradition of governing. "A measure of the monarchs'

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<sup>116</sup>Donald M. Seekins, "Historical Setting," in Russell R. Ross, ed., *Cambodia: a country study* 3rd ed. (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1990), 9-15,

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-20.

status was the willingness of the French to provide them annually with complementary rations of opium."<sup>118</sup>

Upon King Sisowath Monivong's (r.1927-1941) death, the successor was his grandson, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The young prince would figure prominently in contemporary Cambodian politics. At nineteen years of age and educated at a French lycée in Saigon, he was chosen for his pliability.<sup>119</sup>

When the Japanese entered Cambodia, the neutralist Vichy French were allowed to remain as administrators. Educated Khmer elite became the most articulate of the nationalists and targeted both the French and Vietnamese in their vitriolic attacks. When the French returned after the surrender of the Japanese, Sihanouk began a campaign of nationalism and independence from the French for which he took full credit. As he consolidated power and paved the way for one-party rule, (himself), he abdicated the throne to his father, Prince Suramarit in 1955. As a "private citizen", Sihanouk amended the constitution and assumed the leadership of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum or People's Socialist Community.<sup>120</sup>

Sihanouk's popularity peaked in 1962 as he maintained a non-aligned stance towards the United States, accepted large power patronage from the Chinese, favored a domestic "Royal" or "Buddhist" style socialism, and encouraged cronyism. In the 1960s, many Cambodian expatriates returned. Included in this group was Saloth Sar, a thirty-two year old schoolteacher who would later call himself Pol Pot. By 1963, signs of unrest challenged Sihanouk's one-man rule. He blamed the United States for encouraging plots

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<sup>118</sup>Seekins, "Historical Setting," *Cambodia*, 18.

<sup>119</sup>Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, 344.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 375-6.

for his overthrow which lead to his refusal of further U.S. military aid in 1963. Diplomatic relations were cut off in 1965.<sup>121</sup>

Conditions inside Cambodia were ripe for a radical change. Sihanouk's primary obsession became film-making with himself as the star as the economy crumbled around him. The growing disparity between the intellectuals and peasantry polarized the political parties. On the left was the nascent communist groups. "Between 1963 and 1970 his policy of state-sponsored terror involving widespread arrests and executions of suspected dissidents led hundreds of students and professionals to join the communist guerrillas in the jungle." On the right were corrupt wealthy businessmen and pro-Western intellectuals who profited enormously from the peasantry. In 1967, forces quelled an insurgency in the Battambang province. The deaths of more than ten thousand peasants lead to further converts for the Communist party.<sup>122</sup>

In March 1970, Lon Nol and other right-wingers orchestrated a coup against Sihanouk in *absentia*. Sihanouk, self-exiled to Beijing, countered by announcing a coalition government and denouncing the coup as another CIA plot against him.<sup>123</sup> Although the extent of direct CIA involvement is widely disputed, the U.S. government

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<sup>121</sup>Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, 377.

<sup>122</sup>Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: politics, economics, and society* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1986), 18.

<sup>123</sup>Norodom Sihanouk and Wilfred Burchett, *My War with the CIA* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1973), 75. Sihanouk, in an attempt to remain neutral and keep his country from being engulfed in war, had reopened diplomatic negotiations with the United States in 1969. He had allowed the North Vietnamese to have bases within the Cambodian border, but tacitly condoned U.S. bombing of these bases. Lon Nol and his supporters depended heavily on American aid. Sihanouk had rejected U.S. overtures for using Cambodia as a base of operations against the North Vietnamese. In this book, Sihanouk is quick to blame everyone else for the failings of his government but himself. The question of CIA involvement has provoked years of debate. The presence of the CIA in Cambodia is not disputed, merely its direct involvement in the coup.

was quick to support Lon Nol. U.S. military assistance totaling over \$180 US million flowed into Cambodia.<sup>124</sup>

Lon Nol's five year rule was plagued by a protracted civil war between his republican army and the Communists. Sihanouk had formed an alliance of convenience with the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) although he knew his life was expendable in their hands. The KCP was headed by Kieu Samphan, Pol Pot, and Ieng Sary. Sihanouk was aware that the KCP was merely using him. In an interview with the Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, Sihanouk is reported to have said:

[I am] 100 percent with the Khmer Rouge...I am useful to them because without them they wouldn't have the peasants, and you can't make a revolution in Cambodia without the peasants.<sup>125</sup>

Over three million internal Khmer refugees were displaced as the two sides fought a protracted and costly civil war. Hundreds of thousands were killed, maimed, or made homeless.<sup>126</sup> Despite heavy American support for the Lon Nol forces, there was little optimism for neither a negotiated settlement nor a government victory. When the Khmer Rouge rolled into Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975, the Cambodians who greeted them with relief were quickly stripped of their enthusiasm. "People began to realize that, in the eyes of the victors, the war was not over; it was just beginning, and the people were the new enemy."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 211.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 228-9. Reported in the New York Times Magazine, 12 August 1973 describing the interview with Oriana Fallaci in May 1973.

<sup>126</sup>Neil Davis, "The Cambodian Conflict," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 January 1975, p. 14.

<sup>127</sup>Seekins, "Historical Setting," *Cambodia*, 48.

April 1975	Khmer Rouge enter Phnom Penh. 34,000 refugees flee to Thailand between 1975-78.
Jan 1979	Vietnamese invasion drives Khmer Rouge and their hostage population of 100,00 to the Thai border. UNHCR offers assistance to the RTG. No response.
March 1979	Total of 3,500 more refugees into Thailand. RTG closes its borders.
June 1979	Incident at Preah Vihear kills thousands of refugees. Thai military behind it.
Oct 1979	Vietnamese attacks on Khmer Rouge drive 100,000 more refugees into Thailand.
Nov 1979	Thailand opens Khao I Dang Holding Center. By May 1980, there are over 130,000 Cambodians.
Jan 1980	Thailand closes borders for second time. New arrivals must enter resistance bases inside Thailand.
June 1980	Plan for "mass repatriation" announced by the RTG. Vietnamese forces attack a Thai village.
Sep 1980	UNHCR establishes offices in Phnom Penh for repatriation of 360,000 people from Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.
Jan 1982	The UN Border Relief Program is established.
June 1982	The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea is formed between Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk, and Son Sann.
Dec 1984- Feb 1985	Vietnamese attacks of Khmer Rouge/resistance camps drive 230,000 civilians permanently into Thailand.
Jan 1989	Phnom Penh and UNHCR sign agreement on voluntary repatriation.
July 1989	UNHCR designated lead agency for repatriations.
Jul/Aug 1989	Paris Peace Conference. All four sides reach consensus on voluntary repatriation.
Oct 1991	UN Peace Plan for Cambodia signed.
Nov 1991	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by UNHCR, Thailand, and Cambodia.
March 1992	First repatriation begins.
March 1993	Last Cambodian refugee camp officially closes.
May 1993	UN sponsored elections.
Sep 1993	Sihanouk signs new constitution as elected head of new coalition government.
May 1994	World Food Program rations come to an end for final group of returnees.
Fall 1994	Khmer Rouge still want people to takeover government. Rejects peace overtures.
Source: Compiled from USCR, "Something Like Home Again", May 1994.	

**Table 4. Chronology of Cambodian Refugees**

### C. THE POL POT YEARS (1975-1978)

Much has been written about the Khmer Rouge and its incredulous barbarity against its own people since the invasion of the Vietnamese in 1978. The atrocities depicted in news documentaries like "The Killing Fields" tell a gruesome story of how a fanatical leader and his followers nearly exterminated half the population of the Khmer people.

In 1979 Thailand was the first nation to recognize the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia, or Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Although the RTG was emphatically anti-Communist, the Khmer Rouge was of strategic importance. "As often in the past, the Thais saw the Vietnamese as a greater threat than the Khmers, a race whom the Thais have traditionally seen as a buffer against Vietnam."<sup>128</sup> The flow of refugees from Indochina spurred the RTG into normalizing relations with its governments. The Khmer Rouge were very effective in keeping their population from crossing the borders. They kept tight control over the approximately seven million Cambodians alive during this period.<sup>129</sup> Estimates of refugees range from thirty to fifty thousand that crossed into Thailand. According to UNHCR figures, about thirty thousand refugees were allowed temporary asylum by the RTG.<sup>130</sup> Another 150,000 fled to Vietnam.

The first wave of refugees into Thailand were mostly from Laos. The Cambodians were significantly less in comparison. The RTG, UNHCR, and other Volags had set up fifteen refugee camps, jointly operated, but mostly funded by the international community. The Thais felt the situation was manageable and would eventually be repatriated or

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<sup>128</sup>William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 58.

<sup>129</sup>Seekins, "Historical Setting," *Thailand*, 217.

<sup>130</sup>Josephine Reynell, *Political Pawns: refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean border* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Programme, 1989), 31. Exact figures from the UNHCR place them at 34,039 according to Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," 272-3.

resettled.<sup>131</sup> When Kriangsak came to power, the policy of "humane deterrence" changed the Thai position.

#### **D. THE PEAK (1979-1981)**

The Vietnamese Army invaded Democratic Kampuchea on Christmas Day of 1978 and captured Phnom Penh by 7 January. At the time of this unheralded move against another communist country, speculations surrounding this maneuver ran rampant. Although Hanoi claimed it wanted to stop the atrocities being committed by the Khmer Rouge, a more likely contributing factor was the interstate conflict caused by the order incursions by the Khmer Rouge into Vietnamese claimed territory. When Pol Pot's forces came to power, they grouped everyone into two categories, "the new people" and "the old people." The new people comprised of intellectuals and supporters of former regimes. Anyone with glasses or ties to the bourgeoisie were targeted.<sup>132</sup> As part of their master plan to rebuild a new society resplendent in past Angkorian glory, a fanatical and grossly miscalculated plan of emptying the urban areas relocating people to the countryside while destroying remnants of Westernization ended in the near genocide of the Khmer people. People died from hunger, disease, purges, and brutality. Death estimates range from one to one and a half million people.<sup>133</sup>

The atrocities of the Khmer Rouge did not concern the Vietnamese so much as their territorial claims to land within the Vietnamese border along the Mekong River. Although the Khmer Rouge had received Viet Minh support during their early years, this had been done out of political necessity rather than a shared ideological affinity. Once in power,

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<sup>131</sup>Seekins, "Historical Setting," *Thailand*, 115-6. Between 1975-1978, official Thai figures estimate approximately 228,200 Indochinese refugees were within their borders.

<sup>132</sup>USCR, *Cambodians in Thailand: people on the edge* (Washington D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1985), 4.

<sup>133</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 28.



the DK Communists refused to acknowledge gratitude to the Vietnamese. Attempts by Hanoi to normalize relations were rejected. Ethnic Vietnamese who had been living in Cambodia for centuries were pushed back. Also alarming were the Khmer Rouge overtures to Beijing.<sup>134</sup> The extreme ethnonationalism encouraged by the Khmer Rouge is not surprising. It has been a recurring theme for the Vietnamese to be considered as "savages" and "villains" for their historic exploitation of its people.<sup>135</sup>

In the year prior to the fall of Phnom Penh, Hanoi officials had publicly discounted direct invasion as a means to weaken the Khmer Rouge. After the action, there was general agreement from regional observers that the move was calculated and long in planning. The lure of annexing Cambodia was too great, "...like a gambler maddened by one loss after another, the Vietnamese authorities have decided to throw in all their stakes and overrun Kampuchea so as to lay the cornerstone for their future great empire."<sup>136</sup>

The RTG perspective in January 1979 reflected uncertainty. Although the Vietnamese had assured Bangkok that an invasion of Thailand was not in their interests, skepticism was warranted. Prior to the new government in Phnom Penh, the Thais had been on the path to normalizing relations with all the Indochinese neighbors. The Thai military knew they were not ready to engage in a successful military conflict against the battle-hardy Vietnamese. Arms and military hardware purchases from the United States increased dramatically.<sup>137</sup> The greatest threat to Thailand's strategic security was the prestige it would lose in the region. Vietnam's continued influence in the region was

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<sup>134</sup>USCR, *Cambodians in Thailand: people on the edge*, 4.

<sup>135</sup>Nayan Chanda, "The Black Book of Hatred," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 January 1979, p. 19.

<sup>136</sup>Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia: Fifteen Day That Shook Asia," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 January 1979, p. 13. Quoted from the Peking People's Daily.

<sup>137</sup>Richard Nations, "Thailand prepares to think of the unthinkable," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 February 1979.

spreading, not only in Laos but also in Cambodia. Thailand did not want to play a subordinate role on the Southeast Asian mainland.<sup>138</sup> Nor did Bangkok want to give indications it wanted to engage militarily with Hanoi. Instead, the Thais played big power diplomacy with ASEAN as its bulwark.

The tension that followed the invasion is also reflected in the international and regional shockwaves it produced. The superpowers did not want direct military involvement. Their support was funneled through military and humanitarian aid. Although Vietnam had attempted diplomatic overtures, the veterans lobby groups rejected any Congressional softening towards Hanoi. China felt Vietnamese aggression had to be halted, or "taught a lesson."<sup>139</sup> In February, the Chinese attacked Vietnam in a four week war to ease the pressure off the Khmer Rouge and Thai government as well as to prove its dominance in the region. However, the Chinese received more damage in that conflict. In 1979, secret negotiations with the Chinese and Thais had built the framework for material support of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>140</sup> In a strange and unlikely network of alliances, the U.S., Thailand, China, and the Khmer Rouge were united in the effort to oust Vietnam from Cambodia.<sup>141</sup> The Soviet Union, the other superpower in this proxy war, remained a close ally or staunch supporter of Vietnam until near the end of the Cold War.

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<sup>138</sup>Michael Leifer, ASEAN and the Security of South-east Asia (London: Routledge, 1989), 90.

<sup>139</sup>Nayan Chanda, "Mustering For a Battle on the Border," Far Eastern Economic Review, 16 February 1979. p.10.

<sup>140</sup>Leifer, 91.

<sup>141</sup>Reynell, Political Pawns, 41. From 1979-1986, the United States gave the Khmer Rouge \$85 US million dollars in economic and military assistance. The Congressional Research Service which provided these figures originally has since reported that these data are no longer available and that the person who gave the figures is not available.

At a foreign ministers' meeting of ASEAN, the group issued an uncharacteristically strong statement (by their standards) condemning the action by Hanoi: "What is happening now in the Indochina region is unfortunate and will not be conducive to the establishment of peace and stability in the region, which we all desire."<sup>142</sup> An editorial comment in the Singapore Straits Times left no doubt:

This intervention of Vietnam, after oft-repeated professions of peaceful intentions, must earn for Hanoi the everlasting distrust of non-communist nations in Southeast Asia. Vietnam's part in contriving the fall of Phnom Penh deserves the universal condemnation of the world community, though with its Soviet ally at the United Nations nothing more than pious declarations are likely to be passed...<sup>143</sup>

By January 1979, the RTG faced a human wave of over 100,000 refugees amassed on the Thai border. The threat to their national security prompted the turnover of refugee operations on the Thai-Cambodian border from the Ministry of the Interior to the Thai military.<sup>144</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Refugees Poul Hartling sent the Thai Prime Minister a telegram offering UNHCR assistance. No response followed.<sup>145</sup> The RTG informed the UNHCR's Bangkok office that the refugees were "illegal immigrants" of which loyalties were unknown. This was partially true. Many of the Khmer Rouge and their population had settled in encampments near the northwest corridor of Cambodia and Thailand. In March, Thailand closed its borders to refugees. Partial explanation for Kriangsak's actions lay in the domestic problems that plagued his government. He was

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<sup>142</sup>Rodney Tasker, "ASEAN Unites in Anger," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 January 1979, p. 13. Quoted from the Singapore Straits Times.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>144</sup>Zarjevski, *A Future Preserved*, 191.

<sup>145</sup>USCR, *"Something Like Home Again": the repatriation of Cambodian refugees* (Washington, D.C.: USCR, 1994), 3.

quickly losing his mandate as a result of a lackluster economy and rising factional tensions within the army and bureaucracy.<sup>146</sup> No doubt, he felt beleaguered by these domestic and international events.

In another incident that was the climax of forced repatriations conducted by the Thai military, over 43,000 Cambodians were bussed from open fields to the cliffs of Preah Vihear. At gunpoint, they were told to cross back into Cambodia. Thousands were maimed or killed as they were pushed down the mountain paths and onto minefields. International furor resulted, but little action resulted. The UNHCR was heavily criticized for not intervening. Kriangsak and his government were pleased over the international attention. The U.S. government in Bangkok later acknowledged regret for its inaction. American pressure would have been the most likely to have effected the Thais. In defense of the UNHCR, it must be realized that the agency operates on the basis of neutrality. They do not have any jurisdiction over a sovereign government, but assists with their approval.<sup>147</sup> American Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, who later became a champion of the refugees said:

We asked the Thais to stop. They refused. We took the view that if the government had been forced to stop in midstream, Kriangsak could have been brought down by the military. Also we hoped that the refugees would be able to get back. We didn't realize how awful the geography was.<sup>148</sup>

If the pushback was supposed to garner international attention, it succeeded. Perhaps too well. The RTG's objective was to pressure the West to increase their resettlement quotas. It was felt that the United States had caused the spillover effects of

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<sup>146</sup>Girling, *Thailand*, 223-5.

<sup>147</sup>Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 88-91.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, 92. Quote by Morton Abramowitz, American Ambassador to Thailand.

a Communist victory in Hanoi and the refugees were by default, were the making of U.S. foreign policy. The coordinated humanitarian assistance between the UN, the United States, and other countries persuaded the Thais to move the refugees away from the border into refugee camps called "holding centers." Its causal effect was a pull factor, the possibility of resettlement to the West.

Under the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh, the Vietnamese were not the "liberators" they claimed to be. The Cambodians were subject to imprisonment without trials, forced migration, and other human rights violations.<sup>149</sup> Because the invasion and subsequent fighting had upset the rice-planting cycle, the threat of a disastrous famine existed. Massive humanitarian aid from the Volags such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam UK, and many others eventually went to the PRK after months of stalling by Phnom Penh.<sup>150</sup>

Michael Vickery, a somewhat controversial Cambodian expert, describes the pull factors in the generation of the second wave of refugees (no order of importance):

- (1) to make contact with the outside world for the purposes of either going abroad or contacting relatives already abroad;
- (2) to trade across the border for commercial purposes;
- (3) to join, or organize, one of the para-military or bandit groups loosely called Khmer Serei, 'Free Khmer.'<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>USCR, *Cambodians in Thailand: people on the edge*, 8.

<sup>150</sup>Shawcross, 96. Cambodia has two main rice crops. The minor one is planted toward the end of the year and in the second in May before the monsoon seasons start. When the monsoon rains drop off, it is harvested in February and March. This is the dry season, also a time when military offensives are usually conducted by both warring sides.

<sup>151</sup>Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, 29.

During this time, the Kriangsak government was heavily dominated by the military. Unlike the United States where there is a strong delineation of responsibilities and authority between the military and political bureaucracy, it is not the same in Thailand. The traditional road to power has been the military. The Thai people have viewed them as political purveyors, to be depended upon if and when political crises occur. Salaried officers do not receive much income from their military positions. For this reason, many enter private businesses. These often lucrative enterprises allow them to yield great influence in national affairs.<sup>152</sup> Power and money have been a cornerstone of the Thai military-political bureaucracy.

Vietnamese aggression greatly worried the RTG. In October 1979, the PRK-Vietnamese forces fighting Khmer Rouge/insurgency forces drove 100,000 people into Thailand. Following a visit to the border by Kriangsak, where he was witness to the horrible conditions along the border encampments, Thai refugee policy reversed itself. Possibly as a combination of humanitarian gesture and international pressure, the RTG allowed the UNHCR to open the Khao I Dang Holding Center. The UNHCR had a budget of \$3 US million dollars. \$500,000 US dollars went to the RTG as an "installment" to help Thailand.<sup>153</sup> This UNHCR operated camp did not contain Khmer Rouge supporters. Instead, most of these people were screened for resettlement to the United States. To

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<sup>152</sup>John B. Haseman, "The Armed Forces," Thailand: a country study, 246. This explains why military officers think nothing of lining their own coffers. Only since the 1980s has there been efforts at reform by the "Young Turks" in the military service. Enlisted personnel are conscripted. When the humanitarian agencies had to rely heavily on Thai military assistance to feed the refugees, Thai generals took their "share" of the aid packages.

<sup>153</sup>Shawcross, The Quality of Mercy, 174.

discourage the numbers of refugees, "post 1979" refugees were deemed ineligible for third-country resettlement.<sup>154</sup>

The RTG closed its border for the second time in January 1980. Asylum-seekers were told to stay on the border. This eventually led to the creation of eight "border camps" which were not controlled by the UNHCR unlike Khao I Dang which was an official center well within the Thai border. The refugees were called "displaced persons" and not granted prospects for asylum or resettlement. By May 1980, the population at the border had reached 130,000. In June, the Thais announced plans for a "mass repatriation" program. It was greatly feared that third-country resettlement could not keep pace with the arrivals. The RTG had no intentions of playing permanent host to Cambodian or any other Indochinese refugees.<sup>155</sup>

The "voluntary mass participation" spurred Vietnamese/PRK incursions into Thai territory in June 1980. Victims of this "voluntary mass" movement included 7,000 refugees from the Khmer-Rouge controlled Sa Kaeo refugee camp that were moved back into Cambodian territory ostensibly to provide bodies for the resistance movement<sup>156</sup> and provide battlefield porters.

Vietnamese/PRK response was a shelled attack on a Thai village and some non-Communist camps. This action into Thai territory affirmed prior suspicions of Vietnamese aggression. The PRK viewed this UNHCR/RTG program as support for the resistance movement. Military retaliation for repatriation was supposed to discourage the movement

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<sup>154</sup>USCR, "Something Like Home Again": the repatriation of Cambodian refugees, 4. From 1975 to 1994, there were 232,000 Cambodian refugees resettled to fifteen countries of permanent asylum. Of that number, about 148,000 Cambodians settled in the United States.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>156</sup>Leifer, ASEAN and the Security of South-east Asia, 107.

of Khmer Rouge-controlled forces back into Cambodia.<sup>157</sup> For the Thais and ASEAN, it was viewed and proclaimed as an unprovoked act. Prior to the Vietnamese attack, ASEAN members Indonesia and Malaysia did not publicly condemn the Hanoi government. With the crossover into Thai territory, there was no room for diplomatic equivocation. The Thais and along with ASEAN worked in concert to keep international pressures on the Vietnamese to withdraw.<sup>158</sup> Other effects from the incursion were the ban on humanitarian aid shipments into Phnom Penh through Thailand.<sup>159</sup> The Thais had tried to be neutral or at least not overtly antagonistic towards Phnom Penh, but all this changed.

By the end of 1981, the peak of Cambodians onto Thailand's borders dropped. The policy of "humane deterrence" (See Chapter 3) was working. The pull factors of their-country resettlement and easier living conditions in the refugee camps were suspended. Despite the armed conflict that ensued with the first voluntary repatriation program, this became a "durable solution" endorsed by the UNHCR. Negotiations between UNHCR and the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh lead to more than 234,000 Cambodians repatriated back from Thailand. (UNHCR reported figures) USCR criticizes the UNHCR its inaccurate reporting. Part of the repatriation program included "resettlement kits" which provided material assistance to returnees. Figures were based on how many of the kits were handed out by the two-man resettlement office in Phnom Penh. USCR charges that there was no verifiable means of separating refugees from Thailand an internally displaced person in Cambodia.<sup>160</sup>

The peak of refugees had come in 1979 when approximately 200,000 Cambodians were driven across to the Thai border. In 1980, close to 100,000 more arrived. Most

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<sup>157</sup>Leifer, ASEAN and the Security of South-east Asia, 107

<sup>158</sup>Haseman, "Government and Politics," Thailand: a country study, 219.

<sup>159</sup>USCR, "Something Like Home Again", 6.

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.



remained at the Thai-Kampuchean border and were forced to take refuge in resistance movement camps.<sup>161</sup> It is important to note that not all the refugees were fleeing the PRK forces. As with many authoritarian regimes like the Khmer Rouge that are ousted, it is essential to have a population travel with them. Many refugees in the border encampments did not have a choice. The Khmer Rouge had forced them at gunpoint to travel with them. This refugee population gave them legitimacy as a government, conscripts for their army, porters at the battlefield to fight the political and military battle with the new government in Phnom Penh.<sup>162</sup> Most importantly, their population was the attraction of humanitarian aid from the international community.

There were two dilemmas posed by assisting the Khmer Rouge population. The first were ethical and moral. It seemed ironic to be aiding the very regime that was responsible for the deaths of so many Cambodians. When the refugee crisis had started, an institutionalized border feeding program did not exist. The United Nations International Children's and Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were providing an informally structured aid program. This was the second problem posed by the Khmer Rouge population. UNICEF and the Red Cross with other Volags were trying to negotiate an aid distribution plan inside Cambodia with Phnom Penh. The Cambodians were faced with a massive famine because the rice planting had been disrupted by war. Knowledge that the same Volags were feeding their enemies would have jeopardized the two-front relief effort. Media attention on the disastrous conditions of the Khmer Rouge populations prompted an international response that belied political revulsion of the Pol Pot forces.

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<sup>161</sup>Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," 272-3.

<sup>162</sup>Interview with Craig Erickson, Executive Director of the Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge (CORKR), 20 July 1994, Washington, D.C.

Daily, awful spindly creatures, with no flesh and with wide vacant eyes stumbled out of the forests and the mountains into which the Khmer Rouge had corralled them. They had malaria, they had tuberculosis, they had dysentery, they were dehydrated, they were famished, they were dying. In many cases, they were so badly starved that their bodies were consuming themselves.<sup>163</sup>

Besides the political problems at the border, UNICEF and the ICRC were faced with the distribution of food to the refugees and greedy Thai military officials who felt entitled to a cut of the aid. A close friend of the Prime Minister was Colonel Prachak Sawaengchit, the commander of the Royal Thai Army's Second Infantry Regiment. UNICEF had warehouses built to store the food and supplies that arrived by truck convoy. Prachak demanded regular payments in the way of a convoy every now and then. He would blackmail the relief agencies by denying them access to the camps and would threaten to close down the whole program. Any infrastructure built for the relief work was also billed to the Volags. Refugees at the border were in need of many items. Also at the border were Cambodian tradesmen that bought goods from Thais traders and sold them inside Cambodia. The Thai traders were "taxed" along the way by Prachak's forces. In this way, he and other corrupt army officials amassed personal fortunes from the border relief program.<sup>164</sup>

In 1981 the World Food Programme took over the responsibilities of providing "food, water, shelter, and basic relief supplies in the border camps" previously done by UNICEF and the ICRC. In January 1982, their care became mandated under the UN

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<sup>163</sup>Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 170-1.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 233-7.

Border Relief Operation (UNBRO).<sup>165</sup> The border camps which totaled eight in number by the mid-1980s served to be of very strategic importance for Thailand.

#### E. THE INTERIM (1982-1983)

In 1982, as an ASEAN sponsored move, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CDGK) was established. For Thailand, China, ASEAN and Western governments opposed to the PRK government, it was a palatable measure that afforded them with an ethical means of publicly providing the resistance movements with military and material aid. "Dilution of the bestial reputation of the Khmer Rouge was paramount."<sup>166</sup>

To describe it as a coalition government is a misnomer. The CDGK leaders vehemently hated one another in private, but publicly refrained from dispelling the myth. The three components of the CDGK were lead by the erstwhile Prince Sihanouk with the French acronym of FUNCINPEC, or National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia. The second was under the Khmer Rouge. The third was the Kampuchean People National liberation Front (KPNLF) lead by Son Sann, a former cabinet minister under Sihanouk in the 1960s.<sup>167</sup>

The strategic and political benefits of forming the CDGK were numerous. For Pol Pot who was the true operator behind his front man, Khieu Samphan, it meant a resurgence of his political and military power. The aid that flowed to the border encampments not only gave the Khmer Rouge international legitimacy but enabled its forces to maintain the guerrilla war against the PRK.<sup>168</sup> Sihanouk was once again in the

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<sup>165</sup>USCR, "Something Like Home Again" 7.

<sup>166</sup>Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-east Asia*, 118.

<sup>167</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 37.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

limelight, playing the benevolent leader. Son Sann's faction was the larger of the two non-Communist factions. His forces comprised the right-wingers that had supported Lon Nol. Sihanouk's attempt to merge the two non-communist coalitions was rejected by Son Sann.<sup>169</sup> Despite the absence of a constitution, headquarters, or viability without outside help, the CGDK was an important milestone in the history of the resistance movement.

One of the reasons the Royal Thai Government allowed the border camps to exist stemmed from strategic considerations. The CGDK and its border camp populations served as a buffer against the encroaching Vietnamese/PRK forces. The resistance groups within the loosely formed government provided conscripts for the guerrilla war being waged inside Cambodia's border. Their strategic location on the border was vital to the movement.

The continued support of these camps on the Thai-Kampuchean border can only be fully comprehended in relation to the strategic concerns of the regional governments and the governments of China and the United States...The border has become an arena in which these interests are being played out; the issue at stake is the balance of power within Southeast Asia.<sup>170</sup>

If the camps had been moved further inland, Thai villagers would have suffered the same shelling and incursive attacks as the border camp populations. It would have invited Vietnamese aggression.

There was another aspect of the difference in Thai policy toward the border camps versus Khao I Dang and other detention centers further within Thai territory. Prior to the consolidation of the CDGK which became autonomous political camps, the movement of people between the borders was rather fluid. Once the resistance groups became politicized, the Vietnamese mined the borders. Many inside the border camps who wanted

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<sup>169</sup>Haseman, "Politics and Government," *Cambodia: a country study*, 201, 207.

<sup>170</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 39.

to return to Cambodia or tried to get resettlement abroad could not. The refugee's mere presence in the camps meant automatic affiliation to the faction that controlled the camp. Security was handled by the Thai military and shared by the Khmer Rouge in their camps. The UNBRO was only responsible and authorized to provide food and shelter to the border people. The UNHCR was not allowed to operate there and could not give them any physical protection. This demarcation between "displaced persons" on the border and "asylum-seekers/refugees" in Khao I Dang was the difference in their treatment and prospects for third-country resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and even local resettlement which was granted to about 9,000 Cambodians of Thai descent.<sup>171</sup>

Site 8	Khmer Rouge
Natro	Khmer Rouge
Ta Luan	Khmer Rouge
Borai	Khmer Rouge
Huay Chan	Khmer Rouge
Sok Sann	KPNLF
Site 2	KPLNF
Greenhill	Sihanouk
Source: Reynell, <i>Political Pawns</i> , Map 1.	

Table 5. Border Camps and their Political Affiliation

By the end of 1982, more than 1.2 million Indochinese refugees from all over Southeast Asia were resettled to third countries of asylum. The United States (616,778), China (262,853), France (86,640), Canada (85,139), and Australia (70,735) were the top

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<sup>171</sup>Court Robinson, "Refugee Protection in Thailand and the Closing of Khao I Dang," in USCR, *World Refugee Survey--1986*, (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1986), 54.

five host countries. These numbers did not include the refugees that were resettled from other Southeast Asian countries of first asylum.<sup>172</sup> Resettlement offers from the West continued to decline. The declining resettlement rates and "humane deterrence" kept the arrival numbers relatively low. As a result, the RTG reversed its policy of "humane deterrence" in 1983.

#### **F. THE THIRD WAVE (1984-1985)**

By this time, the reality of the refugee camps was disheartening to both the RTG and the people in the camps. More than 350,000 Indochinese refugees were living in squalid conditions without a political resolution in sight. To make matters worse for the Cambodian refugees living on the border, a new Vietnamese offensive in December 1984 sparked a new exodus of refugees into Thailand. By 1985, more than 234,000 Cambodians were crowded into Site 2, just inside Thai territory. The RTG treated them as temporary illegal immigrants and did not allow them to be screened for permanent resettlement abroad.<sup>173</sup>

The UNHCR/RTG program of voluntary repatriation was on hold. Despite the lifting of "humane deterrence" in 1983, there were reports of Cambodian asylum-seekers being pushed back across by border guards and police who were under orders from the government.<sup>174</sup> The Heng Samrin government was suspicious of returning refugees. Many were Khmer Rouge or other resistance forces disguised as repatriating refugees.

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<sup>172</sup>Zarjevski, A Future Preserved, 190.

<sup>173</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 48-50. Although none of the refugees are afforded permanent asylum by Thailand, the refugees in Khao I Dang and detention centers have a chance to be interviewed by the UNHCR for resettlement. At one time, arrivals after 1979 were barred from the resettlement process. Though the Thais have reversed that policy, new arrivals, especially in the border camps are considered "illegals" and do not have resettlement prospects.

<sup>174</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1985, 54-5.

From 1975 to 1985, Thailand was able to resettle eighty percent of its 650,000 Indochinese refugees to countries of permanent asylum. Of that number, approximately seventy percent or 364,000 went to the United States.<sup>175</sup>

#### G. THE WAITING YEARS (1986-1991)

Thailand was experiencing overall economic growth in the 1980s. With a six percent growth rate in 1987 with projections for steady growth to 1992,<sup>176</sup> the push for domestic development was of paramount concern to the Thais. In the Fifth Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) promulgated by the Royal Thai Government's Permanent Subcommittee for Economic and Security Coordination, two of the four identified security threats to Thailand were (1) open military attacks by Vietnam and (2) refugees. The refugees "presented problems of infiltration, subversion, sabotage and espionage, in addition to being a financial and administrative burden for Bangkok."<sup>177</sup> This was the first time the Thais had integrated defense requirements with economic and social development programs. The domestic pressures combined with the strategic and humanitarian concerns of the refugees proved to be extremely frustrating.

Despite UN resolutions condemning Hanoi's presence in Cambodia and the refusal of most countries to acknowledge Heng Samrin's government as the legitimate power in Phnom Penh, the Vietnamese had no plans to withdraw of their own volition. The Khmer Rouge which had become a potent force again, thanks to the UN (primarily American) donors providing humanitarian assistance and the Chinese who gave them military aid,

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<sup>175</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 51.

<sup>176</sup>Court Robinson, "Refugee Protection in Thailand and the Closing of Khao I Dang," 54.

<sup>177</sup>Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Thailand: Defence Spending and Threat Perception," in Chin Kin Wah, ed., *Defence Spending in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987), 87.

they posed a greater ethical dilemma than before. The RTG refused to consider the border camp inhabitants anything more than displaced persons. The humanitarian agencies were at the mercy of donor countries for financial support, the Thai military for the security, and the RTG for allowing the refugees to be housed on Thai territory. This continued the stalemate on the border.<sup>178</sup>

The pervasive threat of PRK/Vietnamese aggression and the presence of more than 360,000 Indochinese refugees continued to pose national security risks for Thailand's government. But the border camps were especially vulnerable to the political and physical risks of all the players involved. On a strategic level, the superpowers continued to play a heavy role in the geopolitical picture. At the state level, the RTG's National Security Council continued to view the camps as a "buffer." The UNBRO and the numerous Volags that worked with the refugees were yet another level in the hierarchy. In the camps, the ruling CDGK faction controlled the everyday fate of the refugees.<sup>179</sup>

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Border	260,000	270,000	311,000	300,000	326,000	370,000
Interior	27,600	23,210	17,470	17,230		
*In 1990 and 1991, USCR combined the different "types" of refugees in Thailand. Source: USCR World Refugees Surveys						

Table 6. Population of Cambodian Refugees in Thailand 1986-1991.

Of the three factions of the CDGK, the Khmer Rouge continued to operate with little regard for human rights. Many of the camp inhabitants were virtual prisoners of the Khmer Rouge. Some had been herded across the border to be their "population" while

<sup>178</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 56.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 55.



others were the wives, children, and family of the soldiers. Many times, the soldiers were forcibly recruited. It was either join the resistance movement or suffer punishment, even execution. The Khmer Rouge had strict control over their population in their camps. The RTG did not and the UN/Volags could not often intervene against the abuses.<sup>180</sup>

In 1987, the UN and Volag people on the border were increasingly uneasy and frustrated that the Khmer Rouge soldiers controlled and benefited from the civilians within the camps.

It is bad enough that a genocidal faction derives credibility and political validation from continued UN recognition as a member of the CDGK. It is appalling that the international community continues to provide aid to these mass murderers in the name of humanitarianism.<sup>181</sup>

The cost of maintaining the camps was about \$36 US million dollars a year. By far, the United States was the greatest donor at thirty-three percent; Japan, twenty-eight percent, the EEC, eight percent; and Australia, two percent. Other countries and NGOs gave the remaining difference. China was the primary donor of military aid to the CDGK, particularly to the Khmer Rouge. The RTG provided nothing but camp security, land, and a willingness to maintain the camps at other countries' expenses.<sup>182</sup>

Part of the thirty-six million dollars went to the Affected Thai Village Programme, which on paper was supposed to aid those local Thai villagers effected by the presence of the camps and the "border towns" which drove up market prices in the area. While it was a good idea in principle, it was largely suspected that a major portion of the money went into the coffers of the Thai military. Secondly, the food and supplies that went to the

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<sup>180</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 131.

<sup>181</sup>Robinson, "Refugees in Thailand," 53.

<sup>182</sup>Reynell, 57-8.

refugees had to be bought on the Thai economy at the insistence of the RTG.<sup>183</sup> Both provisions made sense from the Thai perspective. It is true that local villagers, like many indigenous populations at refugee camps all over the Third World, received less medical care and sometimes food than the refugees in the camps. Also, the food and supplies had to be purchased somewhere. If the camps were on Thai territory, one cannot really blame the RTG for insisting on benefiting from refugee aid money.

Other ways in which the Thais benefited throughout the refugee crises was the strong military support from the United States, but more importantly, rapprochement with China. When Beijing had started supporting the Khmer Rouge, they withdrew military and financial support to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The CPT lead insurgency movements had been Thailand's greatest source of domestic instability. Also, its standing in the international community was much improved and brought in billions of tourist dollars.

Developments on the international political scene paved the way for a final solution to the Cambodian refugee crisis. In December 1987, Prime Minister Hun Sen of the PRK met with Sihanouk for a series of bilateral negotiations to settle the fate of Cambodia. Sihanouk was not speaking on behalf of the CDGK. As a private person, he hoped to have more flexibility. He had taken a year long absence from his faction.<sup>184</sup> In July 1988 there was progress for a political negotiated settlement of Cambodia. The CDGK and PRK met with representatives from ASEAN and Vietnam. In November 1988 Sihanouk, Son Sann (KPLNF), and Prime Minister Hun Sen (PRK) signed a joint communiqué agreeing to a series of negotiations. Despite China's insistence, the Khmer Rouge was not at the talks.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Reynell, *Political Pawns*, 58.

<sup>184</sup>Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia*, 141.

<sup>185</sup>Reynell, 183.

By 1989 the Khmer Rouge was gaining an advantage over a weakened PRK. As Vietnam's economy could not continue supporting all their puppet regimes, some of the troops had been withdrawn from Cambodia. However, the Khmer Rouge was still a source of great embarrassment to the West, particularly the United States. As they started gaining more territory within Cambodia, their military tactics reminded the world that Cambodia might once again return to their control.<sup>186</sup>

When the Soviet Union signaled an unwillingness continue financing military and economic to Vietnam, the Vietnamese forces began a full withdrawal of its forces in Cambodia. The U.S. shifted policy and began bilateral talks with Vietnam.<sup>187</sup> These superpower shifts in long-standing policy lead the way to the 1989 Paris Peace Conference. Although it did not produce real peace in Cambodia, some tangible differences resulted. The four different factions of the civil war were able to reach a consensus on the principle of voluntary return, freedom of choice, and respect for fundamental human rights.<sup>188</sup> Although the latter two agreements are highly suspect, the refugees were allowed to be repatriated.

With the end of the Cold War, the civil war in Cambodia heated up. Without Vietnamese backing, the Heng Samrin-Hun Sen government and the factions of the CDGK together with the UN Security Council agreed to a second peace conference in 1991. This time, the UN Peace Plan was more than a piece of paper. It set the way for the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and nationwide elections that would let the

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<sup>186</sup>Josh Getlin, "Looking into Darkness," in Kari René Hall, *Beyond the Killing Fields* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1992), 19.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>USCR, "Something Like Home Again", 10. The full text can be found in Annex IV of the Peace Accords.

people of Cambodia decide who they wanted to lead their government.<sup>189</sup> But more importantly, the final repatriation of 360,000 Cambodians was guaranteed.

#### H. REPATRIATION AND CONCLUSION (1992-PRESENT)

The 360,000 Cambodians on the Thai border are now officially repatriated. In realizing the enormity of the task accomplished by the UN and the Volags, the RTG, the many governments, and refugees it is any wonder that statement can be made. When UNTAC went into Cambodia, this peace-keeping mission was the most successful in the post-Cold War era<sup>190</sup> in the context of the almost impossible mission that it faced.

The first repatriation convoy left Cambodia on 30 March 1992. Exactly one year later, the last Cambodian refugee camp closed. UNTAC and the UNHCR were responsible for the repatriation and resettlement of the refugees. The UNHCR was given \$600 US million dollars to aid the returning and internally displaced Cambodians.<sup>191</sup> Over 540,000 Cambodians were given resettlement packages from six options: (a) **Agricultural Land:** included two hectares of agricultural land per family, a housing plot, wood for construction of a house frame, \$25 US to buy thatch and bamboo, a household/agricultural kit (including water buckets, mosquito nets, various handtools, and a blue plastic sheet), and WFP food for 400 days; (b) **House:** a plot of land for a house, wood for construction of a house frame, \$25 US to buy thatch and bamboo, a household/agricultural kit, and food for 400 days. (or 200 days if the returnee decided to settle in the Phnom Penh area); (c) **Cash:** included reintegration money of \$50 US per adult and \$25 US per child under 12, a household/agricultural kit, and food for 400 days, or 200 days if settling near Phnom

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<sup>189</sup>USCR, "Something Like Again", 11.

<sup>190</sup>Cambodia Documentation Commission, "The UN in Cambodia: A Brief Evaluation of UNTAC in the Field of Human Rights," (New York, UN, 1994), 15.

<sup>191</sup>Francis Deng, Protecting the Dispossessed (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993), 104.

Penh; (d) Income Generating Tools was too complicated and scrapped; (e) Employment: returnees who were offered jobs with UNTAC or other organization in Cambodia while they were in the Thai camps would receive reintegration money (same as for Option C) and food for 400 days (200 in Phnom Penh) but no household/agricultural kit. Option E returnees generally, though not always were put on a fast-track to leave the camps; (f) Family Reunion: this option was intended for families of soldiers or Option E returnees who had preceded them into Cambodia. It included reintegration money (same as amounts as for Option C) and food for 400 days (200 days in Phnom Penh). Option C- Cash was the most popular. The threat of civil war is still very much alive in Cambodia.<sup>192</sup>

From 23-28 May 1993, more than ninety percent of eligible Cambodians turned out to vote in the first fair and free UN-brokered elections. As a result, the Sihanouk faction (FUNCINPEC) gained a small majority of 45.5 percent over the Hun Sen (Cambodian People's Party) government. With 38.2 percent of the votes, Hun Sen was named to the number two post. They agreed to share power when members of the CPP threatened to secede with several of the eastern provinces.<sup>193</sup> The Khmer Rouge did not gain any political power and continues to be a source of friction for the State of Cambodia.

The new government does not have a tradition of governing without corruption, coercion, and incompetence. While it lacks in cohesiveness and ability, they still hope to keep the powder keg from blowing. The Khmer Rouge is still a potent force to be reckoned with. Acts of sabotage, kidnapping, and subversive guerrilla activities have once again made them an outlaw organization in Cambodia.

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<sup>192</sup>USCR, "Something Like Home Again", 23-4.

<sup>193</sup>Deng, Protecting the Dispossessed, 101.

Financial support of the Khmer Rouge comes from the sale of gemstones and teak to Thai military officers.<sup>194</sup> Those activities are not officially sanctioned but condemned by the RTG. In the midst of this continued fighting, thousands of Cambodians have once again become internally displaced or had to flee across the border to Thailand. The RTG refuses to allow any refugees to seek permanent asylum in Thailand.

Continued problems from the returnees are the lack of arable land, land-mines, and friction between returnees and the ones who had stayed behind in Cambodia. Though UNTAC and the donor governments and agencies tried to address the disparities with a wide range of programs, it was difficult to reintegrate more than half a million people in one year. The disparities between the two groups include educational disparities and health (refugees in Thailand had received better care). (It is important to note that roughly half the population of the refugees had never seen Cambodia. Many were children who had been born in the camps.) The Khmer Rouge capitalized on the social unrest to promote themselves and stir rising nationalism against the coalition government, especially the Vietnamese-tainted Hun Sen faction.<sup>195</sup>

Meanwhile, the RTG is courting Vietnam as the next member of ASEAN. It is in their best interests to see a stable and prosperous Cambodia on their border. There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War was the main impetus to resolving the Cambodian refugee problem. For over a decade, the refugee camps provided a base for Khmer Rouge/CDGK guerrilla activity. Although they were recognized by the international community as the legitimate government-in-exile, it is doubtful that sustained fighting from the border would have been tolerated for much longer. Eventually, the Vietnamese would have realized that developing their own economy was more important than

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<sup>194</sup>Nate Thayer, "Rubies are Rouge," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 February 1991, p. 29. Although this particular article was written in 1991, the situation did not change much in 1994.

<sup>195</sup>Deng, *Protecting the Dispossessed*, 105-6.

supporting the Cambodians. This would surely have made the Thais switch partiality to the Vietnamese. The attraction of a trading partner would have outweighed the political fight on their borders. The threat of a Vietnamese invasion had receded from the minds of the Thais before 1987.

The Cambodian refugee crisis was far more complicated than the others. The huge numbers of people seeking asylum were a very real threat to their national security. In assessing the variables that make this situation unique, it is obvious that political problems exacerbated the refugee generation from Cambodia and kept them just within the borders of Thailand. Although economic and social factors were present, the overwhelming evidence shows that politics transcended all issues in the conflicts between the superpowers, the regional powers, and the coalition factions of the various Cambodian governments including the one in Phnom Penh. Ironically, a political solution rather than an economic boon was the solution to repatriating the refugees.

In assessing the behavior of the Thais and the humanitarian agencies, especially that of the UNHCR, this situation caused more friction than cooperation. Unlike the Laotian case where both sides felt the refugees were driven by economic pull factors, the Cambodians were the victims of a Thai policy to use them as human buffers against the aggression of the Vietnamese. Although they showed some compassion by allowing so many refugees from Indochina to be afforded some measure of protection by the international community, let us not forget that only 9,000 refugees of Thai-descent were ever granted permanent asylum into Thailand. The amount of money skimmed from the humanitarian aid effort will never be known, but in exchange for money, the RTG "allowed" the refugees to be housed on Thai territory. The RTG was particularly adept at manipulating the international community into responding. As the next chapter will show, pushbacks and media worked more than once to shock the refugee-receiving governments into action. In the Cambodian situation, the incident at Preah Vihear was the most compelling for its shock value.

The humanitarian mission of the UN, Volags, and donor countries is commendable. However, would \$36 US million dollars a year have been sustainable considering the many other refugees in the world that needed protection and assistance? Donor commitments were already flagging by 1989. Luckily for the UN, the Cambodians, and the RTG, the best thing that ever happened was the economic woes of the Soviet Union that lead to the end of the Cold War.





## V. THAILAND AND VIETNAM

### A. INTRODUCTION

When the pro-American government in Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Communists in April 1975, it was the culmination of more than a century old struggle for Vietnamese ultra-nationalists seeking to drive out a dominant foreign power. It also signaled an end to the protracted "people's" revolutionary wars and the beginning of a Communist lead series of domination all over Indochina. Subsequently, pro-American sympathizers and people with ties to the *ancien régime* faced torture, execution, or re-education camps.

Although hundreds of thousands of refugees left for sanctuary in the United States and other Western nations, this chapter will focus primarily upon the Vietnamese refugees that sought asylum in nearby Thailand. Unlike the resettlement countries, Thailand's experience with Indochinese refugees was forced upon them by geography. Vietnam is bordered by the South China Seas on its east, the People's Republic of China to the north, and Laos and Cambodia on its west. The Mekong River which borders Thailand and Cambodia is less than a scant eighty or so miles away. This study is about the relationship between the Vietnamese refugees and their host government of Thailand and will include the international dimensions that integral to this crisis. Because of the superpower proxy wars of the Cold War, the United States was a key player in the RTG's handling of its Vietnamese refugee crisis.

This chapter will examine the political, social, and economic events surrounding the push and pull factors of the Vietnamese exodus from 1975 to 1992. Although political considerations were the primary pull factor in drawing the refugees to the United States and other countries of resettlement, the root sources of push factors were social and economic. As this study will show, the three waves of Vietnamese refugees were motivated by different reasons. The first wave following the fall of Saigon were

comprised mainly of people with ties to the former South Vietnamese government and Catholics. This comparatively small group of politically persecuted refugees was expected. The second wave consisted mainly of ethnic Chinese, the Hoa, who were departing by the thousands with the tacit approval of the Hanoi government. As a wealthy minority group in Vietnam, they were socially branded for unpopular relocation plans. In the latter outflows, a broad spectrum of Vietnamese mainly from the middle and lower classes left for primarily economic reasons.

Thailand's reception of all the Indochinese refugees was not one of welcome. Relations were tense with all three refugee-generating governments. However, the attitude towards the Vietnamese refugees was particularly hostile. Unlike the Laotians that shared cultural and ethnic similarities with indigenous Thais and the Cambodians on the border that served a political purpose as a human "buffer" zone, the Vietnamese and Thais shared a legacy of centuries-old enmity. Of the three refugee groups, bilateral relations between the refugee-generating (SRV) and refugee-receiving (RTG) states in this case was the worst. Relative to the Cambodians, the numbers of Vietnamese in Thai detention centers and camps was low. However, more international media attention was given to the plight of the Vietnamese refugees than the other two groups, especially the "boat people" because of the inhumane push-off policies that lead to so many of their deaths.

Despite the unpopular methods used by the RTG to deter Vietnamese refugee inflows, the result was satisfactory to the Thais. Arrivals decreased and the international community responded with two different measures to combat the refugee crisis. The first was a bilateral program in 1979 between the United States and the SRV called the Orderly Departure Program (ODP). The second was the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) which was signed and implemented by sixty-five countries. This chapter will examine how Thai tactics riveted the attention of the world and enacted an international solution to another component of the Indochinese refugee crises.

## B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Vietnamese people are descended from the fifteen or so tribal groups that comprised the Lac Viet. They were dominated for over one thousand years by the Chinese whose influence Sinified their culture. Vietnam was pejoratively called "Annam" or "protectorate of the pacified south."<sup>196</sup> In the tenth century, Vietnam broke away from their Chinese rulers and formed 900 years of self-rule all the while facing sporadic attempts by their northern Chinese neighbors to wield greater influence. Their empire was in a constant battle with the kingdom of Siam to gain suzerainty over vassal peoples in what is modern day Cambodia and Laos. However, unlike the Siamese who retained their independence from colonial empires, the Vietnamese did not. The emperor Tu Duc signed the Treaty of Saigon in 1862 with France. It ceded territorial control over their empire to an imperial power and marked the second beginning of foreign domination.<sup>197</sup>

After the Second World War, the French made the same mistake in Vietnam as it had in its other protectorates. The colonial administrators favored an indigenous ruling elite and failed to recognize the pent-up nationalism of disenfranchised revolutionaries all over Indochina. The Battle of Diem Bien Phu in 1954 marked the end of French claims and the First Indochina War. Subsequently, the Geneva Agreement of 1954 partitioned the North and South along Communist and anti-Communist lines. Ho Chi Minh ruled in the North and Ngo Dinh Diem in the South.<sup>198</sup> A planned plebiscite deciding the reunification of Vietnam never materialized. Backing the South against Communism, the Americans followed in the footsteps of the French. And like the French, the Americans lost in what became known as the Second Indochina War.

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<sup>196</sup>Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia, 69.

<sup>197</sup>Barbara Leitch Le Poer, "Historical Setting," in Ronald J. Cima, ed., Vietnam: a country study (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989), 30.

<sup>198</sup>Steinberg, 360-1.

By backing one contender - by actually creating that contender - the United States was not just fighting a border war or intervening... in a power struggle between two similar contenders, two dynasties. It was entering into a moral and ideological struggle over the form of the state and the goals of the society.<sup>199</sup>

### C. THE FIRST WAVE (1975-1978)

	1975	1976	1977
Cambodian	17,038	6,428	7,045
Lowland Lao	10,195	19,499	18,070
Highland Lao	44,659	7,266	3,873
Vietnamese	4,446	5,213	5,328
Total	76,338	38,406	34,316
Source: UNHCR, Bangkok in Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," p. 272.			

Table 7. Arrivals of Indochinese Refugees into Thailand, 1975-1978.

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees into Thailand were not new. Thailand had been playing host to them for centuries. In the twentieth century, the Thais had allowed refugees from the First Indochina War to take refuge within their country. After the Second Indochina War which produced this first wave of refugees, the RTG had not yet identified them as a threat to national security. However, these policies changed in November 1977 with the installation of the Kriangsak government. Reasons cited for

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<sup>199</sup>Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake (New York: Random House, 1972), 7.

labeling the refugees as "illegals" were population pressures, land shortages, and potential economic friction between Thais and refugees.<sup>200</sup>

Of the 14,987 Vietnamese that arrived as part of the first wave of Indochinese refugees, only thirty-five percent came by boat.<sup>201</sup> The remainder came by land. The majority of refugees did not seek refuge in Thailand during this time. The United States was the intended destination of this group. Approximately 125,000 former South Vietnamese with ties to the American government or family relations were evacuated to the United States by American forces.<sup>202</sup>

#### D. THE SECOND WAVE (1978-1982)

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Cambodian	3,528	137,894	43,608	16	14
Lowland Lao	48,781	22,045	28,967	16,377	3,203
Highland Lao	8,013	23,943	14,801	4,356	1,816
Vietnamese	8,818	16,119	26,491	22,511	6,228
Total	69,140	200,001	113,867	43,260	11,261
Source: UNHCR, Bangkok (from Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," p. 272.					

Table 8. Arrivals of Indochinese Refugees into Thailand, 1979-1982. Figures do not reflect the Cambodians in the border refugee camps.

<sup>200</sup>William P. Tuchrello, "The Society and its Environment," in Thailand: a country study, 116.

<sup>201</sup>Nakavachara and Rogge, "Thailand's Refugee Experience," 272. Compiled from UNHCR, Bangkok.

<sup>202</sup>Zolberg et al., 164.

In late 1978 the Hanoi government and a splinter faction of the Khmer Rouge invaded Cambodia. The international ramifications of this action affected not only Cambodia, but foreign relations with Thailand, China, the United States, the Soviet Union and ASEAN. Relations between the Thais and Vietnamese had been historically strained. As a result, "...Thai policies towards refugees from Vietnam have tended to be harsher than those directed towards an other group of Indochinese refugees."<sup>203</sup> Although both countries had been moving towards normalization, the Cambodian invasion reversed any progress. With the arrival of the boat people, enmity between the two states increased. The invasion also prompted negative reaction from the Chinese. They viewed encroaching Vietnamese as upstarts and wanted to curb further moves towards regional hegemony. Hanoi already controlled parts of Laos and now Cambodia. The ensuing border war between the PRC and SRV became the second clash between two Communists countries in the region. The United States condemned the Vietnamese presence and further pushed Vietnam into the Soviet's orbit. As for ASEAN, they put forth a united front against the invasion although individual members had varying degrees of disapproval.<sup>204</sup>

The border war with China and second outflow of Vietnamese refugees was in part prompted by Vietnamese policies towards their ethnic Han Chinese minority population, the Hoa. In 1978 as part of the new regime's continuing crackdown against former South Vietnamese elements, the Hoa were targeted for relocation to the New Economic Zones (NEZ). The NEZs were part of the new social and economic plans that abolished private enterprise and shifted populations from overcrowded urban areas to the sparsely populated rural zones. Prior to the 1975 takeover, the ethnic Chinese minority controlled "80 percent of the food, textile, chemical, metallurgy, engineering, and electrical industries,

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<sup>203</sup>Robert P. DeVecchi, "Politics and Policies of 'First Asylum' in Thailand," in USCR, World Refugee Survey--1982 (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1982), 20.

<sup>204</sup>Ronald J. Cima, "The Society and its Environment," in Vietnam: a country study, 214-220.

100 percent of wholesale trade, more than 50 percent of retail trade, and 90 percent of export-import trade."<sup>205</sup> After 1975 the Hoa were stripped of their property and made to relocate as peasants in the inhospitable and unarable rural areas of the NEZs. By diffusing the economic power of this traditional merchant class, the new government decreased subversive elements and likely sources of dissent, distributed its population more evenly, and encouraged minorities to leave for China and other countries of resettlement.

Other push and pull factors maintained outflow of Vietnamese refugees. First, the United States continued to feel a moral obligation to offer resettlement for their former South Vietnamese supporters. This was a major pull factor that encouraged outflows of dissatisfied Vietnamese. The exoduses were viewed as a vindication of U.S. policy. A regime whose population chose "exit" because they could not utilize "voice" was negative propaganda for the West. Second, the Vietnamese government continued to overhaul social and economic policies. These push factors created the refugees known as the "boat people." They were the ethnic Chinese minority and former American supporters who continued to be a target for re-education, relocation, and detention. "The majority were under thirty-five years of age and included many young men, who left to avoid conscription."<sup>206</sup>

At first, the Vietnamese government made illegal departures very difficult. However, they quickly realized the societal benefits of decreasing ethnic tensions and political dissent by ridding themselves of their politically undesirable citizens. The illegal departures were in reality facilitated by the government. Publicly, however, the official position remained adamantly opposed to the departures. One cited reason was the negative impacts of refugees on their Southeast Asian neighbors. Of the 86,373 boat people that fled Vietnam in 1978, only 6,301 or 7.3 percent arrived in Thailand; of the 202,158

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<sup>205</sup>Cima, "The Society and its Environment," Thailand, 101.

<sup>206</sup>Long, Ban Vinai, 40.



refugees in 1979, 11,887 or 5.8 percent; of the 71,451 in 1980, 21,549 or 30.2 percent; of the 74,749 in 1981, 18,378 or 24.6 percent; and of the 43,807 in 1982, 6,076 or 13.8 percent. Thailand was the fourth most important destination for the "boat people" behind Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Indonesia.<sup>207</sup>

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
(Boat Arrivals in Thailand)	(202,158)	(11,887)	(21,549)	(18,378)	(6,076)
(Percentage of total Vietnamese outflow)	7.3%	5.8%	30.2%	24.6%	13.8%
Compiled from UNHCR, Bangkok in Nakavachara and Rogge's "Thailand's Refugee Experience" and UNHCR The State of the World's Refugees					

Table 9. Percentage of Total Vietnamese Boat Refugees as Arrivals in Thailand

Although the numbers of Vietnamese refugees in comparison to the Laotian and Cambodians was small, the prospect of granting asylum for them was not any more palatable than for the other groups. The Royal Thai Government looked towards the United States and other Western nations to absorb the influxes. The RTG policy reflected their attitude towards the United States as being the responsible party to the fall of the South Vietnamese government and subsequent refugee crisis. As the second crisis started, the recommendation at the U.S. Congressional hearings before the Subcommittee on Asian

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<sup>207</sup>UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 26-7. Figures were tabulated with numbers of Vietnamese Land and Boat arrivals from UNHCR, Bangkok in Nakavachara and Rogge's "Thailand's Refugee Experience."

and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on International Relations was to favor increased refugee admissions.<sup>208</sup>

Sixty-five countries met at the First Convention on Indochinese Refugees in 1979 to determine the fate of the waiting refugees. The media blitz that depicted the plight of the "boat people" captured the attention of the international community and effected a positive response. As a result, almost 700,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled to fifteen countries of permanent resettlement.<sup>209</sup>

Another means to prevent the dangerous illegal departures of the Vietnamese Boat People was the Orderly Departure Program. This was a bilateral arrangement between the United States and the Vietnamese government to facilitate legal migration brokered by the UNHCR. Applicants were to be screened approved by both governments before being resettlement could take place. In the early stages of the program, many of the former American supporters in re-education centers were not included in the list. Begun in 1979, the ODP did not make much of an impact until 1981 when 9,815 names matched.<sup>210</sup>

The boat arrivals to Thailand arrived around the tip of Cambodia and into the coastal waters of the Gulf of Thailand. These arrivals were housed at the Songkhla camp on the Kra peninsula and at Laem Sing in the Chanthaburi province on the eastern coast of the Gulf. In 1981, as part of the "humane deterrence" policy for all refugees, the camps

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<sup>208</sup>House Committee on International Affairs, Refugee crisis in Indochina, 1978, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 1978, hearings before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, 17 May, 8 June, and 15 August 1978. Statements made before the committee invoked the Nazi atrocities and likened them to those committed by Pol Pot. Mr. Cherne of the Citizens' Commission on Indochinese Refugees made references to the American reaction to what was occurring in Nazi Germany and President Roosevelt's decision to refuse the docking of the St. Louis to an American port. The hearings stated that the United States had a responsibility to assist the refugees in Indochina and made recommendations for American refugee policy.

<sup>209</sup>UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, 26.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

were closed to new arrivals. New arrivals were taken to inland camps where resettlement processing was not an option. They were put into camps with the overland Vietnamese and/or mixed with the Cambodian refugees in the border camps.<sup>211</sup>

Land refugees arrived in Thailand by way of Cambodia and Laos. These refugees faced land mines, fighting between the Khmer Rouge guerrillas and the Heng Samrin forces, starvation, and many other dangers to seek refuge in Thailand. The RTG found they were not settled as quickly as the Boat People. Generally, these refugees did not prefer overseas resettlement. "...they remain in camp awaiting hoped-for reunion with other family members or return to their homelands."<sup>212</sup> Qualities that made them less desirable for resettlement were their lower levels of education and lack of transferable vocational skills. Many did not already have family members already residing in the United States nor did they have former ties to the American government in South Vietnam. These were the primary criteria for overseas resettlement to the United States.<sup>213</sup> In the end, the United States agreed to resettle approximately fifty percent of the land Vietnamese refugees.

Throughout this peak period of Indochinese refugee exoduses, the RTG's primary method for resolving the crisis was third country resettlement. Although the United States and fourteen other nations were accepting the refugees by the hundreds of thousands, the Thais knew this would not continue indefinitely. This pressure combined with the ancient enmity for the Vietnamese resulted in a controversial and ugly series of incidents involving Thai fisherman. Disguised as "pirates", the fishermen found looting Vietnamese Boat People to be far more lucrative work than fishing. The boat people often fled from

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<sup>211</sup>DeVecchi, "Politics and Policies of 'First Asylum' in Thailand," 20-1.

<sup>212</sup>USCR, "Indochinese Refugees: No End in Sight," in World Refugee Survey--1981 (Washington, D.C.: USCR, 1981/ANCS), 18.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid.

Vietnam with gold and other currency. "In 1981, 77 percent of the boats which left Vietnam and eventually landed in Thailand were attacked; in 1982, 65 percent; and in 1983, 56 percent."<sup>214</sup>

The Gulf of Thailand piracy attacks have garnered much international criticism. Not only were they attacked for their gold, but women, children, and even men were viciously raped; they were drowned; or sold as prostitutes. Although the RTG did not endorse the attacks, little was done to prevent them. Few arrests of the pirates were made. If they were, the witnesses were often coerced not to testify. Witnesses have corroborated the unbelievable tales and even implicated Thai naval and marine patrols in the crimes. Yet, they continued while the RTG turned a blind eye to the attacks.<sup>215</sup> The media attention of the boat people and the piracy attacks resulted in programs like the ODP and the opening of quotas for refugees, their families, and immigrants.

In 1981 the United States and the RTG agreed on a joint anti-piracy program funded with \$2 US million dollars. The UNHCR coordinated a UN-sponsored program. The money was given to the RTG. The Thai National Security Council was the overall administrator and formed the Royal Thai Government Committee on the Suppression of Piracy, but generally, the programs proved ineffective. The committee's intentions were clearly reflected in the number of times it met during the first ten months since inception. They met only once. During this time, Prime Minister Kriangsak's power was tenuous, the Communist Party of Thailand was still carrying on insurgency movements, the clashes on the Cambodian border, and other national security concerns stretched their available resources.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>Roger Winter and Joseph Cerquone, "Pirate Attacks Against Vietnamese Boat People Continue," in World Refugee Survey--1984, 9.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid.

<sup>216</sup>Winter and Cerquone, 9.

Whatever the true reasons for the Thai's lack of interest in combating this humanitarian crisis, the word did get back to the would-be boat people in Vietnam. The number of refugees decreased. Part of the credit must go to the ODP which opened the doors for legal immigration. From 1983 to 1986, there was a steady outflow of both refugees and migrants, but the numbers were manageable.

	1983	1984	1985	1986
Boat Departures	28,055	24,865	22,214	19,538
Orderly Departure Program	18,978	29,154	24,940	18,418
Source: UNHCR, <i>The State of the World's Refugees</i> , 26.				

Table 9. Comparison of Boat and ODP Departures from Vietnam. Figures are as of January of the calendar year.

Overall, the Thais were very successful in minimizing the impact of the Vietnamese refugees. The burden of maintaining the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand was the smallest of the three Indochinese refugee groups. A combination of strong deterrent measures such as the "humane deterrence" policy of 1981, the "blind eye" approach to the piracy attacks, and refusing to grant the "illegals" permanent asylum kept the number of Vietnamese refugees low. Most importantly, however, the RTG was adept at garnering support from the international community. The heavy pressure on the United States and other resettlement countries was maintained and even fueled during this second wave. It enabled the RTG to put on the facade of being a compassionate and humanitarian country while funneling a great deal of the responsibility to the international community.

#### **E. THE THIRD WAVE (1986-1992)**

The third wave of Vietnamese refugees was a surprise to the international community. The steady outflow of refugees and immigrants of the early and mid 1980s

averaged around 42,00. Yet at the beginning of 1986 the numbers of boat departures alone rose to 31,694. By 1989 the numbers had risen to 65,349.<sup>217</sup>

Thailand was alarmed by the new influx. In 1986 the number of boat arrivals was 4,392. In 1987 the numbers had risen to 12,820. The dramatic increases were felt all over Southeast Asia.<sup>218</sup> In 1988 the RTG declared an end to first asylum for Vietnamese refugees and instituted the push-off policies that redirected the boat people towards international waters. More than 1,000 boats were pushed back to sea in one month. There were reports of more than 100 known dead.<sup>219</sup> Malaysia, too, redirected the boats.

This brought about another media furor and captured the attention of the international community. The RTG were very good at manipulating both. The United States Congress convened several hearings to decide what measures should be taken for this third wave of Vietnamese boat people.

The Thai rationale for denying access to resettlement at least for the foreseeable future is Thailand's concern not to draw even more Vietnamese asylum-seekers...We testified last year that "it will take the creative energy of policy-makers throughout the international community to explore alternatives which embody humanitarian principles on the treatment of refugees but also relieve the burden faced by first asylum to refugees." Today I am pleased to report that, with U.S. leadership, this is in large measure taking place.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup>UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, 26.

<sup>218</sup>Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Refugees: Why the Outflow Continues," in Amin Saikal, ed., Refugees in the Modern World. Canberra Studies in World Affairs No. 25. (Canberra: Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1989), 45.

<sup>219</sup>Robinson, "Refugees in Thailand," 53.

<sup>220</sup>Statement of Jonathan Moore, U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs at the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Indochinese Refugees at Risk: the Boat People, Cambodians under Khmer Rouge Control, and Re-education-Camp Detainees, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1978, hearings before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, 8 February 1989, 89.

As a result, the United States and other concerned and effected nations met in June at Geneva to convene the Second Convention on Indochinese Refugees. What resulted was the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA). For reasons that will be stated later, the scope of this plan was very different in the treatment of the third wave of asylum-seekers. Some of the elements of the CPA were:

- All Vietnamese boat people would be permitted to land in first asylum countries and would be screened for refugee status.
- All boat people who qualified as refugees would be resettled in a third country. Those who did not qualify would have to return Vietnam under a guarantee, monitored by UNHCR, that they would not be prosecuted for illegal departure.
- A program would be set up by UNHCR to provide reintegration assistance to the returnees.
- The ODP program would be expanded, its criteria liberalized and its procedures simplified to allow easier legal emigration for eligible groups such as family reunification cases and former re-education camp internees.
- A "mass information campaign" would be launched in Vietnam to inform the population of the provisions of the CPA, in order to discourage those who would not qualify as refugees from embarking on a life-threatening journey in the mistaken belief that they would automatically be resettled in the West.<sup>221</sup>

This approach to the problem did not automatically assume the asylum-seekers were true refugees. In this case, the signatories of the second international conference were correct in their assumption. This third wave contained many economic migrants that were "supposed to be the beneficiaries of the revolution."<sup>222</sup> Instead, the devastated economy,

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<sup>221</sup>UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, 27.

<sup>222</sup>Zolberg et al., 165.

natural disasters, and Vietnam's monetary ostracization from the West and the UN made living conditions within the country difficult and were major push factors. Many knew of the better economic opportunities and material benefits available to them in the West. But only on the condition that they could get there.

The United States and other resettlement countries offered the biggest pull factor: permanent asylum in a Western country. As a result of the liberal policies, the Vietnamese who had relatives in the United States were eligible for asylum. The network of overseas Vietnamese had a system whereby a family member, usually male, would make the journey to a first asylum country. By far, the offer of resettlement was the main pull factor. As William Shawcross wrote:

Another theory, which has been held by some refugee officials from the start, is that the very existence of the resettlement programs created a 'pull factor' drawing Indochinese away from home. After all, half the world would like to live in Orange County - but only the Vietnamese and, to a lesser extent, the Cambodian and the Lao. were being offered any such opportunity. So of course thousands jumped and, despite the dangers, still jump at it.<sup>223</sup>

Once accepted for asylum in the West, immigration was possible under family reunification rules. The network was very effective in providing a place for emigration for the asylum-seeker.<sup>224</sup> In a sense, the economic migrants of this third wave exploited the refugee admissions quotas by jumping the system by claiming asylum.

These asylum-seekers for the most part were not being persecuted for their race, religion, or political affiliation. They wanted better economic opportunities.

Most are farmers and labourers who think they will find a better life elsewhere. The Vietnamese appear well organised,

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<sup>223</sup>Thayer, "The Refugee Exodus from Vietnam: Why the Outflow Continues," Pt. 2, Quoted from William Shawcross, Canberra Times, 10 June 1989.

<sup>224</sup>Zolberg et al., 165.



and officials in Thailand say many often know the names of the Western refugee officials operating at Phanat Nikhom, the main holding camp for Vietnamese refugees in Thailand. They leave Phanat Nikhom when they have a visa to settle in the West.<sup>225</sup>

The dangers were definitely still present. Although the anti-piracy programs had started to decrease the number of attacks, there was evidence pointing to a darker effect of the program. Because of the program's efficacy in punishing the perpetrators, the pirates were more inclined to dispose of the evidence, that is, kill any survivors that could live to tell a story. Even a United States naval warship, the *U.S.S. Dubuque* was guilty of not assisting a drifting Vietnamese boatload of refugees.<sup>226</sup>

As a result of the international attention and the CPA, more Vietnamese refugees were repatriated to a Vietnam with a sagging economy. In 1990 the Vietnamese economy suffered a series of unemployment shocks. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, and a recession in Europe forced thousands of overseas Vietnamese workers to return home. The Vietnamese army, once with 1.3 million troops was cut in half. The resulting unemployment rate was more than twenty percent. Dissent was internalized by massive human rights abuses as reported by Amnesty International and the International League for Human Rights.<sup>227</sup>

By 1991 the number of piracy attacks was zero. The numbers of Vietnamese refugees was declining. Relations between Vietnam and Thailand improved. By the end of 1993 only 9,800 Vietnamese refugees remained in Thailand. These are the die-hards

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<sup>225</sup>Thayer, "The Refugee Exodus from Vietnam: Why the Outflow Continues," Part 2.

<sup>226</sup>Court Robinson, "Sins of Omission: The New Vietnamese Refugee Crisis," in World Refugee Survey--1988, 5. By not rescuing the boatload of 110 passengers, the commanding officer condemned them to drifting for days. The survivors ran out of supplies and were forced to become cannibals to survive. They were rescued a month later. 52 survived. The commanding officer of the *U.S.S. Dubuque* was court martialed.

<sup>227</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1991 (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1991), 67.

who do not want to give up their hopes for resettlement to the West. The Vietnamese government has allowed the UNHCR to monitor repatriated refugees. For Thailand, the refugee crisis is nearly over.

## F. CONCLUSIONS

Although the numbers of Vietnamese refugees relative to the Laotian or Cambodian refugees were low, there were several variables that created bigger problems for the Royal Thai Government. One, the ancient rivalry between the two countries repeated itself in the invasion of Cambodia in 1978. Mistrust and ethnic tensions between the Thais and Vietnamese manifested in a harsher treatment of the Vietnamese refugees although the second wave were mostly ethnic Chinese Hoa. Two, the unfortunate deterrent policies practiced by the Thai government in the form of push-backs and late prosecution of pirates gained them nothing but international criticism. Surprisingly, the Thais did not feel their actions warranted such condemnation. Three, the lure of resettlement became a pull factor. The policy of getting rid of the refugees was merely creating more refugees. This Catch-22 situation proved to be extremely frustrating to both the RTG and the international community. For the majority of the Vietnamese refugees, Thailand was never the intended country of permanent asylum.

The first wave of refugees were fleeing political persecution was expected in all three Indochinese cases. In the Vietnamese case, the major push and pull factors were social and economic. The mild "ethnic cleansing" of the ethnic Chinese population released societal pressures. The latter wave of asylum-seekers was driven by decreased economic opportunities in Vietnam.

In resolving this crisis, it is obvious the role of the UNHCR and the international community was the key. Not only were the resettlement countries accepting refugees, but addressing the root causes of refugee generation. As economic development occurs in Vietnam, the likelihood of a fourth wave of refugees is low. In 1994 the United States

lifted the trade embargo against Vietnam. After twenty years, normalized relations seem to be in the future. For Thailand, who is Vietnam's primary champion for ASEAN membership, the renewed economic vigor of Vietnam means an expanding source of raw materials, an ever increasing market, and hopefully, no more refugees. Being eminently practical, the Thais have once again subordinated past political feuds to seek the higher road to wealth and prosperity in a new economic trading partner.

## **VI. LESSONS FOR THE UNITED STATES**

### **A. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE THAI EXPERIENCE**

#### **1. PUSH FACTORS**

Thailand's experience with Indochinese refugees from 1975-1992 chronicled a myriad of push factors present in refugee crises. There are several general assumptions that can be inferred for most refugee movements. The following findings are from the case studies of Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugee movements into Thailand.

**a. The basic root of all refugee generation lies in political change.** This is the inherent cause of persecution. Political upheaval can and in most cases exacerbate pre-existing economic and social conditions. Fragile economies can deteriorate rapidly from a disruption in crop plantations, international embargoes and sanctions against an unfriendly regime, and misguided fiscal and monetary policies that discourage private enterprise and a free market system. Ethnic tensions will increase persecution of a minority, especially if that group formerly held power or controlled the economy. In each of the three refugee flows into Thailand, the fall of a particular regime and subsequent change of guard created an exodus of refugees.

**b. The occurrence of an initial outflow of refugees supportive or sympathetic to the ousted government can be assumed.** In Laos, the Hmong hilltribe people were persecuted for fighting in the resistance against the Pathet Lao. The Hmong and other resistance groups continued insurgency movements after the installation of the new government. In Cambodia, the rise of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge created an outflow of Lon Nol and Sihanouk supporters. The fall of Saigon triggered a mass exodus of pro-American South Vietnamese.

c. The second flow of refugees have characteristically been the migration of people (a) who were not able to leave with the initial outflow and (b) those who became the victims or targets of the new regime for real and perceived opposition. The second wave of Laotians were comprised of both Hilltribe and Lowland people. Stark political and economic conditions prompted both groups of Laotians to seek protection in Thailand. The Hilltribes were waging insurgency movements against the Pathet Lao to return to a pre-1975 Laos. Ill-suited adaptations to Western cultures influenced many to forgo third-country resettlement. The Lowland Lao sought resettlement in the West. Their motives for seeking refuge in Thailand were motivated by poor economic conditions in Laos.

The second wave of Cambodians were fleeing political persecution from the Khmer Rouge and/or the new Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh. Parts of the Khmer Rouge refugee population were moved against their will and at gunpoint by their captor-leaders. They were perceived to be sympathetic to the rebel insurgency movement. Anyone from a Khmer Rouge-controlled refugee camp was automatically labeled as a guerrilla or sympathizer. The Cambodians that were not affiliated with the Khmer Rouge supported either the Son Sann forces or the Sihanouk-lead FUNCINPEC.

The Vietnamese refugees comprising the second wave were mainly the targets of ethnic discrimination. The ethnic Hoa lost both their property and human rights under the new regime. These push factors prompted a willingness to risk death on the high seas to seek better conditions outside of Vietnam.

d. In latter waves, economic push factors generate refugee movements more aptly described as economic migrants. Pull factors such as resettlement opportunities and better living conditions in the camps generated these latter outflows. The demographic makeup of these refugees differed significantly from the former two. This group was less educated and lacked former ties to the ousted government. Questions arose from receiving government surrounding their status as bona fide refugees.

Refugees from...	1st Wave	2nd Wave	3rd Wave
Laos	political	political/economic	economic
Cambodia	political	political	political
Vietnam	political	social/economic	economic

Table 10. Primary independent variables that were the push factors for refugee generation

## 2. PULL FACTORS

When conditions in a state are so unbearable as to create mass migrations of people, even countries that do not offer permanent asylum or guarantees of personal safety such as Thailand are preferable to remaining in the country of origin. By far, the two most important pull factors were permanent resettlement to a third country, preferably Western and the use of camps as a base for insurgency movements.

**a. Permanent resettlement:** The three groups that were most drawn to resettlement abroad were the Lowland Lao, the educated Cambodians that supported pre-Khmer Rouge governments, and the Vietnamese. For many of the Laotians, living conditions in the refugee camps were better than back in Laos. Refugee camps provided food, shelter, education, vocational training, and opportunities to sell indigenous handicraft to the local marketplaces. Vietnamese responses given for reasons of flight were usually to seek better opportunities abroad and/or to escape political persecution.

**b. Use of camps for a guerrilla base:** General trends among the Hmong, land Vietnamese, and Khmer Rouge factions showed a preference to wait until conditions allowed for repatriation. The Khmer Rouge were screened out for asylum abroad. Persons who commit atrocities are not eligible for resettlement. This was a problem for many of the people trapped within the Khmer Rouge camps that were guilty by association. The guerrilla resistance movements fought for a change in the government.

### 3. VARIABLES IN THAI REFUGEE RECEPTION POLICIES

At the onset of the refugee crises, the Royal Thai government was beset with their own domestic problems. Because of internal politics, the treatment of the Indochinese refugees ranged from tolerance, hostility, to resignation throughout the crises.

Initially, the RTG was somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the non-Communists that fled the Communist regimes in Vientiane, Phnom Penh, and Saigon. Thailand was fighting its own Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgencies. The CPT was receiving ideological, military, and financial aid from China. When the second wave arrived, the Chinese agreed to stop aiding the CPT in return for Thai support of the Khmer Rouge. This quelled the CPT movements. By the time the third wave arrived, the Thai economy was developing rapidly and the resolution of the refugee crisis seemed improbable without a political solution.

Much of how the refugees were received depended upon four variables I have identified: (a) ethnicity; (b) interstate relations; (c) international response; and (d) political utility. These variables determined how Thailand as the receiving state dealt with the three refugee groups.

Variables in refugee reception	Laotians	Cambodians	Vietnamese
Ethnicity	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Interstate relations	Positive	Neutral	Negative
International response	Positive	Positive	Positive
Political utility	Negative	Positive	Neutral

Table 11. Determinant variables in the treatment and reception of refugees

a. **Ethnicity:** In the Laotian case, shared ethnicity between Laos and Thais was a plus. They were received without the rancor directed at the Vietnamese arrivals. The ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were not treated any better. Vietnamese refugees of any ethnic background were disliked. Ethnicity was not a discernable variable in the reception of the Cambodians.

b. **Interstate relations:** With the exception of a few skirmishes over border disputes, the RTG and Pathet Lao were the first to have normal relations. Although the RTG allowed the "warrior-refugee" Hmongs and other Hilltribes to take refuge in the camps, it did not officially endorse any insurgency movements to topple the government.

The Cambodian government in Phnom Penh was not recognized by neither the Thais nor international community to the consternation of both Heng Samrin and Hanoi. It was not conducive for normal relations between Bangkok and Phnom Penh. However, the Thais recognized the coalition government-in-exile which included the Khmer Rouge. Initially, the Khmer Rouge and the RTG were at odds because of Khmer Rouge attacks on Thai villagers. However, these issues became subordinated after the 1978 invasion by Vietnam. This made it difficult to fully endorse and accept the Cambodian refugees. The Thai military was suspicious of Cambodian refugee support.

Centuries of past enmity between the two states for control over Laos and Cambodia incurred ethnic and political tensions present into the Cold War period. With Vietnamese aspirations to be the hegemon in the Southeast Asian subregion, the Thais were particularly indisposed towards SRV aggression. This reflected in the treatment of their refugees.

c. **International response:** Without the presence of the UNHCR and the many other Volags as well as government agencies, the Thais would have treated the refugees with even less compassion. Their reluctance to house, feed, and care for over



one million refugees was not unreasonable. Although permanent asylum was but granted to a handful and only a modicum of sustenance was given to the refugees, the Thais must receive due credit. Because the international community responded with humanitarian assistance and resettlement plans, the Thais were not faced with a domestic crisis stemming from the refugee inflows. This was extremely important to the Western alliance. As a linchpin state in the region, the fall of Thailand to Communism would have been a blow for the West. By subsidizing the refugee camps and turning a blind eye to the graft and corruption demanded from members of the Thai military, the West was able to support an important ally while providing humanitarian relief to hundreds of thousands of genuine refugees.

**d. Political utility:** The political utility of refugees was an important factor in sustaining the refugee camps. Lack of political resolution towards non-Communist governments in refugee-generating states sustained refugee generation. The Laotians began to wear out their welcome. However, they were the first group to be part of a bilateral repatriation plan between Thailand and a refugee-generating state.

The Cambodians on the border served as a buffer against further Vietnamese encroachment. As long as the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh existed, the RTG National Security Council was not loathe to have the refugee camps on their border. The refugees were purposely labeled "displaced persons" and ineligible for resettlement. Their positive utility made hostages of the camp inhabitants.

The Vietnamese served little utility. Their existence and presence lead to push-back and human deterrence policies to bring back the focus and attention of the international community on the refugee crisis. It resulted in two international Indochinese conferences and two plans for a durable solution. They were the ODP and the CPA. However, because of the incredible criticism and negative press of the Gulf of Thailand attacks and push-off policies received by the RTG, any political utility gained from resettlement offers was offset.

#### **4. THAI POLICIES THAT AVERTED DOMESTIC UNREST**

How then did the Royal Thai Government avert domestic upheaval related to the major influxes of refugees? The RTG created unfavorable conditions to minimize the pull factors and maintained strict adherence to refusing permanent asylum to the refugees.

First, the Thais are not a signatory to the UN Protocol. This absolves them of legal responsibility to provide asylum. However, for moral and ethical reasons, the Thais could not completely close their borders to arrivals. Physically, it would have been impossible to maintain control of their porous borders. They lacked the technology and resources.

Second, by declaring the refugees as displaced persons and/or illegal immigrants the RTG had the flexibility to grant or deny refugee status throughout the crises. The plight refugees at the Khao I Dang detention center were no different than the ones at the border refugee camps. However, because the Thais chose to label the border inhabitants as "displaced persons" instead of as refugees, they denied them a chance to be screened for resettlement opportunities.

Third, the use of "humane deterrence" and "push-off" policies were undeniably effective in controlling the rate of arrivals. Although projected arrival numbers cannot be measured in the absence of the policies, the numbers did level off after 1981 when "humane deterrence" was put in place.

Fourth, the Thais manipulated the international community for humanitarian assistance. Despite the gloom and doom forecasts of the economic burdens posed by the refugees, the international community donated generously for their maintenance. Along the way, Thai military officials and Thai villagers benefited as well. Whenever interest in the refugees waned, the Thais were adept at creating a media event designed to bring attention to the plight of their unwanted guests.

## B. SUMMARY OF RECENT U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

At the end of fiscal year 1993 (FY93) 132,144 refugees applied and were granted political asylum in the United States.<sup>228</sup> (See Appendix C) By the year's end of 1993, more than 150,000 people were in need of protection or assistance.<sup>229</sup> Refugees can apply for asylum through two avenues, application at overseas Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) offices or at domestic INS offices. Approval rates for asylum are much higher for overseas refugee admissions applicants than for asylum-seekers within the United States by more than a three-to-one ratio. Paradoxically, the guidelines for refugees admission to the United States is stricter. In order for a refugee to be screened in for resettlement/asylum to the United States, they must fit into one of the six priority groups:

- Priority One: Compelling Concern or Interest
- Priority Two: Former U.S. Government Employees
- Priority Three: Family Reunification (spouses, unmarried children, or parents of persons in the United States)
- Priority Four: Other Ties to the United States
- Priority Five: Additional Family Reunification (married children, siblings, grandparents or grandchildren of persons in the United States)
- Priority Six: Otherwise of National Interest (in specified regional groups whose admission is in the national interest)<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup>U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs, World Refugee Report (Washington, D.C.: GPO, July 1993), 263. The following comprise regional breakdowns:  
Africa 5,491                      East Asia: 51,848                      Private Sector Initiatives (Cubans): 853  
Eastern Europe: 64,184      Latin America: 2,924                      Near East and South Asia: 6,844

<sup>229</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1994 (Washington, D.C.: USCR/ANCS, 1994), 40. Included in these figures are people from former Yugoslavia.

<sup>230</sup>Court Robinson and Bill Frelick, "Lives in the Balance: The Political and Humanitarian Impulses in US Refugee Policy," International Journal of Refugee Law Special Issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 300.

The United States ranked number one in refugee admissions from 1975-1992. During this period, more than 1.7 million refugees were given resettlement and permanent asylum. The top ten groups granted asylum were Former Soviet Union (61,298); Vietnamese (ODP) (40,826); Laos (7,315); Vietnam (self-departure) (3,510); Ethiopia (2,972); Cuba (2,867) plus 853; Iran (2,692); Somalia (1,570); Romania (1,499); Afghanistan (1,480). The bulk of refugees from Eastern Europe, were primarily from the Former Soviet Union; and East Asia were primarily from Vietnam.

Resettlement Country	1975-1992 Cumulative	1992 Only	Total Population (in Millions)	Ratio of Resettled Refugees/Asylees to Total Pop.
Sweden	152,608	12,791	8.7	1:57
Canada	407,379	36,409	28.1	1:69
Australia	205,862	9,758	17.8	1:86
United States	1,731,090	137,395	258.3	1:149
Denmark	34,089	4,100	5.2	1:153
Norway	27,410*	2,830	4.3	1:157
Switzerland	32,297	8,839	7.0	1:217
France	227,085	10,943	57.7	1:254
New Zealand	13,028	800	3.4	1:261
Austria	29,007	2,289	7.9	1:272
Netherlands	30,300	4,553	15.2	1:502
Germany	112,262 #	9,189	81.1	1:722
Spain	39,166	296	39.1	1:998
United Kingdom	35,032	16,435	58.0	1:1,656
Source: USCR, World Refugee Survey--1994				

Table 12. Refugees Resettled in Relation to Total Population \* Inaccurate, statistics unavailable for 1975-1981. # Does not include ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union, Poland, and Romania

In FY93, asylum approval rates (people who apply after arriving in the United States) were highest among the Syrians, Sudanese, and Somalis. The largest number of asylum-seekers seem to be from Third World countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, PRC, and Haiti. (See Appendix D) The nationalities of the asylum-seekers would lead one to believe they are more likely to be economic migrants. Approval rates are as follows: Guatemalans (6.5 percent of 34,681); Salvadorans ( 4.6 percent of 15,362); Chinese (49.4 percent of 14,354); Haitians (22.8 percent of 11,377).<sup>231</sup>

The United States Refugee Act of 1980 provided an avenue for refugees and their families to enter the United States, which was supposed to establish uniform and non-ideological standards for determining refugee eligibility.<sup>232</sup> However, this belies actual implementation. Southeast Asian and Former Soviet Union refugees continues to be high. In fiscal year 1993, they were the largest number to be admitted at 48,627.<sup>233</sup>

### C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

The following conclusions are provided as suggestions for broad U.S. refugee issue applications.

1. The end of the Cold War marked a turning point in refugee generation and our relationship with those regimes that tended to create them. (See Appendix E) If there is one lesson to be learned from this study, it is this: **THE COLD WAR IS OVER**. Yet, our refugee admission reflect the attitude of stalwart Cold Warriors. During the Cold War, refugees from Communist countries were granted *de facto* asylum. This is reflected in the

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<sup>231</sup>USCR, World Refugee Survey--1994, 169.

<sup>232</sup>Arthur C. Helton, "The Refugee Act's Unfulfilled Asylum Promise, " in USCR, World Refugee Survey--1985, 5.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

reception of Cuban versus Haitian refugees. Cubans were granted automatic asylum while the Haitians were often interdicted in international waters and returned to Haiti.

It is 1994 and yet our refugee admissions numbers are highest from the former Soviet Union and Vietnam. The State Department move towards decreasing Vietnamese refugee admissions is a logical policy.<sup>234</sup> The latest waves of refugees to leave Vietnam are most likely to be economic migrants, not refugees.

2. As the Indochinese refugee crisis showed, there are at least two waves of refugees that exit a country after the fall of a government. The first is usually expected. The second has distinct elements of economic factors driving the exodus. If the United States pursues foreign policy objectives by supporting a particular regime, we must be willing to accept the consequences of failure. Because of our major role in reinstating and supporting Aristide, we are ethically and morally bound to accept any future refugees that may be created from a toppled Aristide government.

This follows the patten of Vietnamese from Indochina. Although we accepted refugees from all three countries, we have accepted many Southeast Asians. This hearkens back to our moral obligations. With the last remaining Vietnamese refugees coming in by the end of FY-96, we should deny admissions to those with frivolous claims, especially the economic migrants that depart on their own.

3. As shown in Thailand's long crisis with its refugees, there were four variables that determined how refugees were accepted and/or treated. They were ethnicity, interstate relations, international response, and political utility. We must be vigilant in disregarding these variables when determining our own refugee admission and asylum policies.

Our neighbor to the south is Mexico. We share common histories and to some degree, ethnicity. The presence of illegal immigrants was largely ignored in the 1980s

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<sup>234</sup>Seth Mydans, "Exodus of Vietnamese Refugees Reaches Last Phase," New York Times 5 December 1994, Southeast Asia Discussion List, SEA-L@msu.edu.

when the economy was growing. In the recession years, Mexican "illegals" have become the target of xenophobic and racist policies that target them as scapegoats. For the RTG, the Laotians became a nuisance during the latter years of the refugee crisis. Many were drawn to better economic opportunities across the Mekong River. We must get better at enforcing border control.

The correlation between Cuba and Cambodia is thus. The United States once viewed Castro as a threat, especially during the Cold War. This fear was abated long ago. The Thais also viewed the Hanoi government warily, but came to realize an invasion was unlikely. The Cuban refugees that came during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift overwhelmed U.S. policy-makers as did the large numbers of Cambodians on Thailand's border. Unlike the Thais that bowed to international pressures of humanitarian aid, U.S. policy-makers are bowing to the political pressures of a very strong lobby group, the Cuban-Americans. We should lift the economic sanctions and embargoes against one of the poorest countries in our own hemisphere. The revolution is over. The opportunities for an expanded market for American goods is enormous.

The perception that racism blocks the black Haitians from receiving the same treatment as the Cuban refugees is valid. Repression and human rights abuses in Haiti are assuredly worse than the socialist state of Cuba. Thailand sought to minimize Vietnamese refugee flows by pushing them back to sea. Is interdiction at sea followed by a one-way trip to Port-au-Prince more humane?

The U.S. government should allow for a more important variable to dominate the criteria for asylum conditions. NEED. The first High Commissioner, Nansen helped those that were stateless. He turned a blind eye to the domestic politics of strong lobby groups and ethnicity by reaching out to people regardless of their situation.

Although the U.S. State Department considers "national interest" in formulating refugee admission policies, we must not allow domestic politics to drive refugee

admissions.<sup>235</sup> Even if the most vocal special interest groups favor admissions of certain groups over others, refugees should be admitted based on their humanitarian needs. This does not have to be true for immigration quotas and admissions. These numbers should be driven by domestic politics.

4. Among the most effective of the Thai policies was "humane deterrence." Although pushing people over land mines, drowning or pushing them off to sea, or involuntary repatriation is not advocated, there is something to be said for decreasing pull factors. This is tied into our immigration and public assistance policies. Our deportation policies for bogus claimants is too lax. Automatic admissions to mass inflows should continue to be checked with refugee camps.

When the boat arrivals from Cuba and Haiti threatened to create a national crisis, they were housed in makeshift refugee camps at NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This was an effective deterrent. Although boat people continued to leave for the shores of Florida, the numbers would have been higher if all the refugees had been granted automatic asylum and entry onto American soil. When Castro decided to decrease tensions in 1980 through the Mariel Boatlift, the refugees were allowed to integrate into American communities. Ten percent of the Marilitos were criminals and the mentally ill, this proved to be a political human weapon against the United States by Cuba. To preclude another crisis, the response to the Summer of 1994's arrivals was a calculated risk that paid off.

When the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians arrived in the United States, many were able to sponsor family members. Part of the package included social security, medical benefits, and welfare. Unlike the first wave of educated elite with ties to the American government, the latter waves did not have any translatable vocational skills or language proficiency. Many refugees arrived to the United States through family reunion.

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<sup>235</sup>Telephone interview with U.S. State Department official, Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration, 7 December 1994.



Usually, a son was chosen to make the journey to the refugee camps in hopes of third country resettlement.

According to a State Department official, the interwoven complexities between immigration, illegal immigration, and public assistance policies give few alternatives to these refugees. Minimum wage jobs do not offer enough medical and other benefits to the unskilled workers. They believe it is better for the welfare of their children to be on the public dole. The overreaching public assistance policies should be reformed. People who have not paid taxes into the system receive benefits because they can. This is an error in our own policies. Reform should allow minimum wage workers some leeway for medical assistance and perhaps some subsidy, but not the "work" penalty that afflicts all Americans on public assistance. Part of the sponsorship program should be the ability of the sponsoree to take care of the family members with limited assistance from the government.

5. Thailand's long history of Indochinese refugee crises did not end until political solutions were brought about. As part of the durable solutions enacted by the UNHCR, voluntary repatriation rather than resettlement is the best answer. It is a physical impossibility to relocate and resettle over 17 million refugees to receiving states. Effecting political change, promoting a stable government, and encouraging economic development should be the priority of the United States around the globe. By bringing peace and prosperity to a country, the tide of refugees is less likely to occur.

Part of this process should be the continuation of generous financial aid to humanitarian organizations despite the inherent problems of waste and politicization. The United States was the lead country in the resolution of the Indochinese refugees. It is the best way to abate the refugee crises and bring about a more peaceful world order.

By adapting and applying lessons learned from the Thai experience, U.S. policy-makers could make American refugee and asylum policies more just. In this way, perhaps the generous spirit of Americans that was a legacy of our immigrant forefathers can reduce the tensions caused by policies gone awry.

## APPENDIX A. SELECTED SOURCES

In addition to first-hand assessments, information gathered from other on-the-ground sources, including local and international NGOs, and from responses to USCR inquiries by governments and intergovernmental organization, *Survey* statistics and country reports also draw from the following sources:

<p><i>Africa Confidential</i>. London.</p> <p><i>Africa Reports</i>. African American Institute. N.Y.</p> <p>Amnesty International publications. London.</p> <p><i>Breakdown in the Balkans</i>. Central Endowment for International Peace. Washington, D.C.</p> <p>Canadian Council for Refugees.</p> <p><i>Central America Newspeak</i>. Central America Resource Center. Austin, Texas.</p> <p><i>Christian Science Monitor</i>. Boston.</p> <p><i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993</i>. U.S. Department of State. Washington, D.C.</p> <p><i>Daily Report</i>. Foreign Broadcast Information Service. U.S. Government. Washington, D.C.</p> <p>European Council on Refugees in Exiles (ECRE) and member agency publications. London</p> <p><i>Far Eastern Economic Review</i>. Hong Kong.</p> <p><i>Horn of Africa Bulletin</i>. Life and Peace Institute. Uppsala, Sweden.</p> <p><i>Human Rights Update</i>. Palestine Human Rights Information. Jerusalem/Chicago.</p> <p>Human Rights Watch publications. N.Y.</p> <p><i>Indian Ocean Newsletter</i>. Paris.</p> <p>International Committee of the Red Cross publications. Geneva.</p> <p>International Council of Voluntary Agencies, Task Force on the Emergency in Former Yugoslavia, Operations Reports. Geneva.</p> <p>International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies publications. Geneva.</p> <p><i>Interpreter Releases</i>. Washington, D.C.</p>	<p>Lawyers Committee for Human Rights publications. N.Y.</p> <p><i>Migration News Sheet</i>. Brussels.</p> <p><i>The New York Times</i>. N.Y.</p> <p>Office of the Foreign Disaster Assistance, AID, U.S. Department of State, Situation Reports. Washington, D.C.</p> <p><i>Report of the High Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East: 1 July 1992-30 June 1993</i>. General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, supplement No. 13 (A/48/13). United Nations. N.Y.</p> <p><i>Report on Food Emergencies</i>. World Food Program. N.Y.</p> <p>Southeast Asia Resource Action Center publications. Washington, D.C.</p> <p>Special Emergency Program for the Horn of Africa. Situation Reports. United Nations. N.Y.</p> <p>UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs publications. United Nations. N.Y.</p> <p><i>UNHCR Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds: Report for 1992-1993 and Proposed Programmes and Budget for 1994</i>. (A/AC.96/808). United Nations. N.Y.</p> <p>UNHCR publications, bureaus, and branch offices world wide.</p> <p><i>UNRWA publications</i>. Vienna.</p> <p><i>The Washington Post</i>. Washington, D.C.</p> <p><i>World Refugee Report</i>. Bureau for Refugee Programs, U.S. Department of State. July 1993. Washington, D.C.</p>
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Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR.



## APPENDIX B. WORLD REFUGEE STATISTICS

Host countries, and the number of refugees received, are in bold type.

<b>AFRICA</b>				<b>TOTAL 5,825,000</b>			
<b>Algeria</b>	<b>*121,000</b>	<b>Egypt</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>Malawi</b>	<b>700,000</b>	<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>479,500</b>
W. Sahara	*80,000	Somalia	6,000	Mozambique	700,000	Burundi	350,000
Mali	35,000	Palestinians	4,300	<b>Mali</b>	<b>13,000</b>	Mozambique	60,000
Niger	6,000	Ethiopia	400	Mauritania	13,000	Rwanda	50,000
<b>Angola</b>	<b>11,000</b>	Other	300	<b>Mauritania</b>	<b>46,000</b>	Zaire	15,000
Zaire	11,000	<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>*156,000</b>	Mali	46,000	S. Africa	3,000
<b>Benin</b>	<b>120,000</b>	Somalia	*100,000	<b>Namibia</b>	<b>5,000</b>	Somalia	1,200
Togo	120,000	Sudan	43,000	Angola	5,000	Other	300
<b>Botswana</b>	<b>500</b>	Djibouti	7,000	<b>Niger</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>Uganda</b>	<b>*257,000</b>
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	<b>6,000</b>	Kenya	6,000	Chad	3,000	Sudan	150,000
Mali	6,000	<b>Gabon</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>4,400</b>	Rwanda	*90,000
<b>Burundi</b>	<b>*110,000</b>	<b>Gambia</b>	<b>2,000</b>	Liberia	3,000	Zaire	15,000
Rwanda	*85,000	Senegal	2,000	Chad	1,400	Other	2,000
Zaire	25,000	<b>Ghana</b>	<b>133,000</b>	<b>Rwanda</b>	<b>370,000</b>	<b>Zaire</b>	<b>452,000</b>
<b>Cameroon</b>	<b>2,500</b>	Togo	120,000	Burundi	370,000	Angola	200,000
Chad	2,000	Liberia	13,000	<b>Senegal</b>	<b>66,000</b>	Sudan	120,000
Other	500	<b>Guinea</b>	<b>*570,000</b>	Mauritania	66,000	Burundi	60,000
<b>Central African Republic</b>	<b>41,000</b>	Liberia	*420,000	<b>Sierra Leone</b>	<b>15,000</b>	Rwanda	50,000
Sudan	23,000	Sierra Leone	*150,000	Liberia	15,000	Uganda	20,000
Chad	18,000	<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	<b>16,000</b>	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>*300,000</b>	Other	2,000
<b>Congo</b>	<b>13,000</b>	Senegal	16,000	Mozambique	*300,000	<b>Zambia</b>	<b>158,500</b>
Angola	10,000	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>*332,000</b>	<b>Sudan</b>	<b>*633,000</b>	Angola	120,000
Chad	2,000	Somalia	*280,000	Eritrea	*420,000	Mozambique	22,000
Other	1,000	Sudan	37,000	Ethiopia	*200,000	Zaire	13,000
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	<b>250,000</b>	Ethiopia	10,000	Chad	*7,000	S. Africa	500
Liberia	250,000	Other	5,000	Other	6,000	Other	3,000
<b>Djibouti</b>	<b>60,000</b>	<b>Lesotho</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Swaziland</b>	<b>57,000</b>	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>200,000</b>
Somalia	40,000	S. Africa	100	Mozambique	50,000	Mozambique	200,000
Ethiopia	20,000	<b>Liberia</b>	<b>110,000</b>	S. Africa	7,000		
		Sierra Leone	110,000				

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR. \* Indicates that sources vary significantly in the number reported.

<b>EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</b>				<b>TOTAL 468,000</b>			
<b>Australia</b>	<b>2,950</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>8,150</b>	<b>Thailand</b>	<b>108,300</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>*296,900</b>	Vietnam	1,900	Burma	5,100	Burma	74,000
Vietnam	285,500	Cambodia	500	Indonesia	1,700	Laos	25,100
Burma	*10,000	<b>Japan</b>	<b>950</b>	Vietnam	1,150	Vietnam	8,800
Laos	1,400	Vietnam	900	Former Yugoslavia	200	Sri Lanka	250
<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>3,550</b>	Other	50	<b>Papua New Guinea</b>	<b>7,000</b>	Other	150
Vietnam	3,550			Indonesia	7,700	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>35,000</b>
				<b>Philippines</b>	<b>1,700</b>	Cambodia	35,000
				Vietnam	1,700		

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR. \* Indicates that sources vary significantly in the number reported.

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA				TOTAL 2,785,000			
Armenia	*290,000	Denmark	23,300	Macedonia	12,100	Slovenia	*38,000
Azerbaijan	*290,000	Former Yugoslavia	17,300	Former Yugoslavia	12,000	Former Yugoslavia	*38,000
Austria	77,700	Other	6,000	Other	100	Spain	14,000
Former Yugoslavia	74,300	Finland	3,700	Netherlands	35,400	Former Yugoslavia	2,200
Other	3,400	Former Yugoslavia	2,200	Norway	14,200	Other	11,800
Azerbaijan	*251,000	Other	1,500	Former Yugoslavia	12,500	Sweden	*58,800
Armenia	*200,000	France	30,900	Other	1,700	Former Yugoslavia	*50,000
Uzbekistan	51,000	Former Yugoslavia	7,000	Poland	600	Other	8,800
Belarus	10,400	Other	23,900	Portugal	2,250	Switzerland	27,000
Belgium	32,900	Germany	*529,100	Former Yugoslavia	150	Former Yugoslavia	14,500
Former Yugoslavia	6,000	Former Yugoslavia	*300,000	Other	2,100	Other	12,500
Other	26,300	Other	229,100	Romania	1,000	Turkey	*24,600
Bosnia and Herzegovina	*70,000	Greece	800	Russian Federation	*347,500	Former Yugoslavia	*20,000
Former Yugoslavia	*70,000	Hungary	10,000	Georgia	*143,000	Iraq	4,000
Canada	20,500	Former Yugoslavia	10,000	Tajikistan	*108,000	Iran	500
Croatia	*280,000	Italy	*33,550	Armenia	*52,000	Other	100
Former Yugoslavia	*280,000	Former Yugoslavia	*32,000	Azerbaijan	25,000	United Kingdom	28,100
Other		Other	1,550	Afghanistan		Former Yugoslavia	6,600
Czech Republic	6,300	Luxembourg	1,500	Somalia	6,500	Other	21,500
Former Yugoslavia	4,100	Former Yugoslavia	1,300	Iraq	6,000	United States	150,400
Other	2,200	Other	200	Other	7,000	Yugoslavia	*357,000
				Slovak Republic	1,900	(Serbia/Montenegro)	*357,000
				Former Yugoslavia	1,900	Former Yugoslavia	

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR. \* Indicates that sources vary significantly in the number reported. Figures for Europe, North America, and Australia are generally those for individuals who applied for asylum in 1993, except for countries such as Armenia, Croatia, and others that do not use individualized asylum procedures. USCR considers Bosnians and Croatians as having a *prima facie* claim to refugee status within the parameters of the Refugee Convention/Protocol, and has therefore attempted to include all such persons who have received temporary legal status, applied for asylum in 1993, or been excluded from applying for status. Because many countries do not report the republic of origin of "former Yugoslavs," this table includes under that heading other asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia, such as ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN				TOTAL 102,000			
<b>Belize</b>	<b>8,900</b>	<b>Colombia</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>4,700</b>	<b>Panama</b>	<b>950</b>
El Salvador	6,100	<b>Costa Rica</b>	<b>24,800</b>	El Salvador	2,400	El Salvador	400
Guatemala	2,200	Nicaragua	20,000	Nicaragua	2,200	Nicaragua	300
Nicaragua	300	El Salvador	4,300	Other	100	Other	250
Honduras	200	Other	500	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Peru</b>	<b>400</b>
Other	100	<b>Dominican Republic</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>52,000</b>	Cuba	400
<b>Bolivia</b>	<b>600</b>	Haiti	1,300	Guatemala	47,000	<b>Venezuela</b>	<b>1,300</b>
Colombia	350	<b>Ecuador</b>	<b>100</b>	El Salvador	4,000	Cuba	1,000
Other	250	Colombia	100	Other	1,000	Haiti	200
<b>Brazil</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>El Salvador</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>4,750</b>	Nicaragua	100
<b>Chile</b>	<b>100</b>	Nicaragua	150	El Salvador	4,700		
Peru	100			Other	50		

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR.

MIDDLE EAST				TOTAL 4,924,000			
<b>Gaza Strip</b>	<b>603,000</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>1,073,600</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>25,000</b>	<b>West Bank</b>	<b>479,000</b>
Palestinians	603,000	Palestinians	1,073,000	Iraq	25,000	Palestinians	479,000
<b>Iran</b>	<b>*1,995,000</b>	Former Yugoslavia	400	<b>Syria</b>	<b>319,200</b>	<b>Yemen</b>	<b>60,500</b>
Afghanistan	*1,900,000	Other	200	Palestinians	314,000	Somalia	57,000
Iraq	95,000	<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>329,000</b>	Iraq	4,700	Ethiopia	1,800
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>39,500</b>	Palestinians	328,000	Somalia	500	Eritrea	1,500
Iran	38,500	Other	1,000			Other	200
Other	1,000						

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR. \* Indicates that sources vary significantly in the number reported.

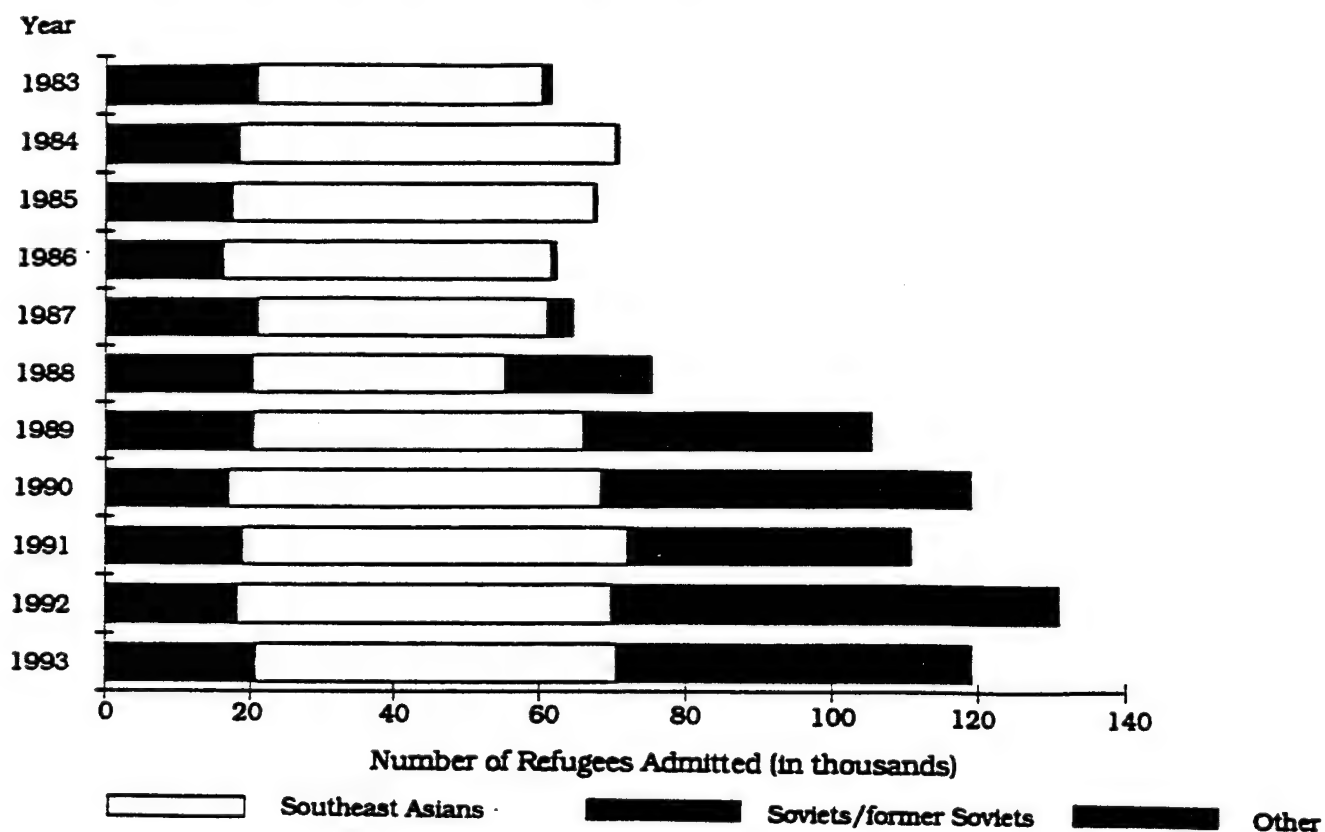
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA				TOTAL 2,151,000			
<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>35,000</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>*325,600</b>	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>6,500</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>1,482,300</b>
Tajikistan	35,000	China (Tibet)	119,000	Tajikistan	6,500	Afghanistan	1,480,000
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>199,000</b>	Sri Lanka	*106,400	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>3,500</b>	Other	2,300
Burma	198,800	Bangladesh	53,500	Tajikistan	3,500	<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>400</b>
Other	200	Afghanistan	24,400	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>99,100</b>	Afghanistan	400
		Bhutan	*20,000	Bhutan	85,100		
		Burma	1,600	China	14,000		
		Other	700				

Source: World Refugee Survey--1994, USCR. \*Indicates that sources vary significantly in the number reported.



# APPENDIX C. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS TO THE UNITED STATES, FY 83-93

## REFUGEE ADMISSIONS TO THE UNITED STATES, FY 83 - 93\*



\* Excludes privately funded admissions.

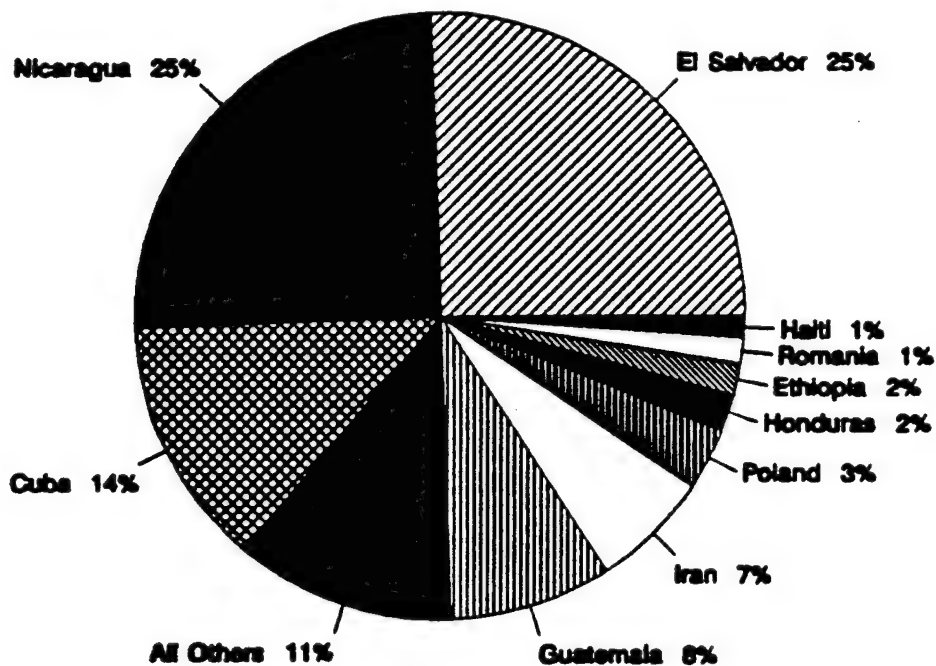
Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs. Compiled by the U.S. Committee for Refugees, designed by Maryland Office for New Americans.





**APPENDIX D. ASYLUM SEEKERS TO THE UNITED STATES,  
FY 1981-FY-1991 BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

**Asylum Seekers to the United States, FY 1981-FY 1991  
By Country of Origin**



Data series ends in March 1991 when INS changed data reporting systems.

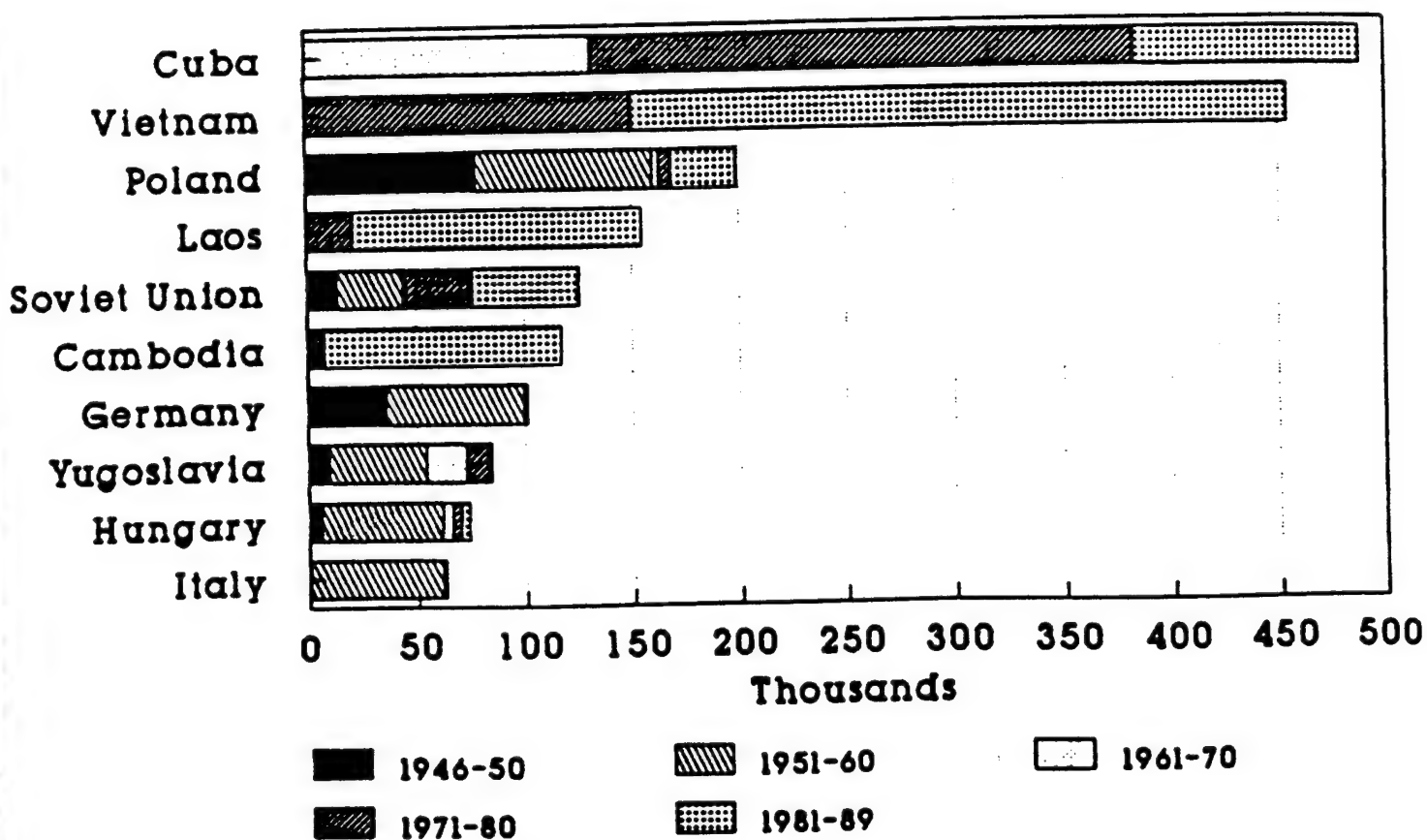
11-year total of asylum applicants is 501,457.

Source: CRS analysis of INS data.



APPENDIX E. TOP TEN COUNTRIES GENERATING HUMANITARIAN ENTRANTS, 1946-1989

Top Ten Countries Generating Humanitarian Entrants, 1946-1989





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